# IMMORTAL KHAJURAHO

KANWAR LAL

*To the genius of India's seers*
*and the talent of her craftsmen*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## PREFACE

Some years ago, I wrote a small book on Khajuraho for Asia Press. Encouraged by its reception, the Publishers asked me to attempt a fuller treatment of this fascinating theme. That this many-splendoured, many-ored mine more than merits such comprehensive quarrying is, of course, beyond question. The art of the place is a great attraction as well as a challenge to the responsive mind and whatever be its particular lure for the individual, it cannot be disposed of in a few facile pages of rhetorical praise or explained away with cynical phrases of pointless indignation. It is true that several studies of the subject have appeared in recent years, but an examination of these will reveal that leaving aside scholarly monographs on selected aspects, the publications are, by and large, fragmentary or squeamish or merely pictorial and blatantly popular. I do not claim that this is a complete book. There never is one—except in the blurbs. Nevertheless, I have made an earnest attempt to understand the value and significance of Khajuraho in our cultural patterns, to view and interpret this work of art as a whole, and to add something to the total vision.

As with my earlier publications through Asia Press, the Publishers have allowed me an absolutely free hand in this case also, and I assume total responsibility for the views and opinions expressed. Such a declaration is all the more necessary in respect of this work because some aspects of the subject are of a delicate nature, and not far removed from where the domain of public morals and official consorship begins. I refer obviously to the so-called erotic element which is such a significant feature of the sculptures at Khajuraho. Since the issue of erotic ornamentation on Hindu temples is a matter of great social, religious and philosophic significance, and since, for many people, the main attraction of Khajuraho lies in these erotic sculptures, I have given serious thought to this question. This is not to say that the erotic has been overstressed. Only, in view of its overwhelming importance the topic has been dealt with at the length it deserves. That, however, is true more of the text for, in respect of the pictorial documentation, only a representative selection has been included—which is a pity. Khajuraho's wealth in this field is astonishing and one would have liked to provide a more lavish display and a truer index of the erotic treasure of the Chandel sanctuaries. Already, Time, that old thief, has robbed us of much : a bare quarter of the total number of temples which were built is extant today. It is necessary, therefore, to make sure that neither prudery nor indifference keeps us from taking full stock and making a complete inventory of our unique inheritance of such symbolic

representation of spiritual realisation. Indeed, it is gratifying to learn that the Government of India has organised a large-scale survey and documentation of the temples of Khajuraho and one hopes that records will be preserved entire and without inhibition and in the fullest detail.

I should like to warn my readers that in the matter of spellings of Indian names and places and other words of Sanskrit or Hindi appearing in the book, I have departed from the convention of spelling words, even where there are no diacritical marks, without reference to how they are pronounced. I think it is time we gave to Indian words their correct intonation and put an end to *Ram* and *Kam* being written and pronounced as *Rama* and *Kama* (cf. drama), *Shiv* as *Shiva* and *Krishn* as *Krishna*—which last is a woman's name. I have tried to approximate the spellings to the sound, and all that the reader has to do is to pronounce the word as he would, given the spellings and his normal sense of the sound of the letters. I am prepared for *scholarly* criticism on this point, but I am unable to accept the conventional for its own sake, and let the reader who does not know the Indian languages pronounce words as they are *not* pronounced, or, at least, ought not to be pronounced.

It is regretted that in spite of the great care taken in the printing of the book, the printer's devil has not let it be without errors. For instance, the word 'nephew' has been printed for 'uncle' in the first line of the final paragraph on page 28; on the same page 'h' has been left out in the name of Sallakshanvarman, on page 31, Hasan Arnal has been printed off as Hasan Amiral; and on page 203, the word 'sansar has been printed as 'samsar'. There are a few more, minor mistakes, but all these are not worth adding a corrigendum for. I must apologise also for the absence of "notes on plates" referred to in Chapter VIII. Limitation of space and the Publishers' intention to bring out a different edition with a much briefer text but with all the plates and "notes on plates" have obliged me to exclude this item from the present edition.

Finally, I acknowledge my indebtedness to many authors whose works I have consulted and drawn upon. As far as possible, all these have been cited under References or listed in the Bibliography. If there are any omissions, these are not deliberate and I seek indulgence in advance.

Delhi,

21st November, 1964 Kanwar Lal

# Contents

# 1

# The Spell

*This is perfect. That is perfect. Perfect comes from perfect.*
*Take perfect from perfect ; the remainder is perfect.*

BRIHAD-ARANYAK UPANISHAD

KHAJURAHO is a modest little village in the Chhatarpur District of Madhya Pradesh, in Central India. Once a resplendent city and a religious centre of repute, this straggling conglomeration of a few thatched huts is now known only for some twenty temples of bygone days. These temples form the precious remnant of a much larger number constructed by the Chandel dynasty nearly a thousand years ago. For long centuries after they were built, the wondrous fanes lay obscure and dreaming, like the Sleeping Beauty of the fairy tale. Then, through the loving caress of some Prince Charming, they awakened once more to life and glory, and today they are counted among India's foremost architectural and sculptural treasures. Visitors from all over the world flock to these fabulous temples as they do to India's other more or less equally famous monuments at places like Ajanta and Ellora, Bhubaneswar and Konark, Agra and Fatehpur Sikri. What is more, these visitors to Khajuraho go there with differing intents and in varying moods for they have heard or read about it that which gives rise to strange expectations and queer, conflicting notions. In the first place, the monuments at Khajuraho represent a most brilliant moment in the history of Indian art, and mark the zenith and culmination of a distinct and distinguished school of temple architecture. Many persons, therefore, go there to delight in the exquisite grace of the temples and to gaze at some of the finest figures ever chiselled in India. Yet, there is a large number of people for whom Khajuraho's main attraction lies in what is popularly known as the erotic element. This, undoubtedly, constitutes a conspicuous part of the sculptural decoration on some of the temples. True, erotic sculpture is not a phenomenon unique to Khajuraho. Konark, Bhubaneswar, Puri and several other sites all over the country exhibit such art. None the less, it is Khajuraho that has come to be rather exclusively associated with the

vision beatific of Shiv and Parvati, and of the Creator and the Created, in embrace, as well as matings of body and body such as beasts would be ashamed to indulge in. With all this and more, Khajuraho, therefore, exercises a pull akin to the power of a wizard's spell, and has grown to be a magic name which conjures up visions of strange delights. For, popular as that Shakespearian bit about "what's in a name" is, nothing could be more erroneous. In fact, God who "wove a web of loveliness, of clouds and stars, and birds...made not anything at all so beautiful as words." The word is mighty ; it is magic; it is God. Through usage and association, and through its shape and sound and composition, it possesses a charm and potency and acquires a meaning and power which admit us into a whole new world of grace and beatitude. Like love, like worship, like delight, like damsel, like youth, like grace, like *kam*, like *apsara*, like *shiv*, like *mukti*, like *usha*, like so many other magic words, is the word Khajuraho. It evokes the joyous and the sensuous, the ecstatic and the exquisite, the graceful and the lustrous. One thinks of fine phrases like the bliss of *Nirvan*, the rapture of love, a dream of delight, a smile in stone, an intense kiss, a beautiful woman, a girl in bloom, a passionate rose, a golden dawn, a starlit night, a bubbling brook, a laughing rainbow, play of the gods. This may sound hyperbolic and merely lyrical, but he who has once seen this shrine of loveliness will not stint in his praise of the temple-city. There are few places where one feels as instinctively and intensely as at Khajuraho that "Truth is Beauty, Beauty Truth"; even more, that both these are not apart from Holiness. *Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*—the True, the Good and the Beautiful—these three eternals, these verities of all verities, are but three aspects of the same entity for the Hindu. They constitute the *Trimurti*, the One which is Three ; and, at Khajuraho, the triple stream flows as one. Here the much-vaunted antithesis between the sacred and the profane does not obtain. As we shall see, this is precisely the philosophy incarnated in the stones of Khajuraho—that, in the Deity all opposites unite, all differences and distinctions which constitute the illusions of the ignorant and the morality of the mundane disappear, cease to have any value, or even a reality. For the seer all is God : that which is good and that which apparently is not good, that which governs the lives and conduct of the gods, and that which animates men and the lower beings ; that which perishes as well as that which persists.

Such then is the sort of world which is Khajuraho; rather, that which was Khajuraho, except that it is difficult to imagine what it really was in the heyday of its glory. The ruins that lie scattered all over provide but a glimpse, afford but a clue ; and of its ancient splendour only the barest outline can be reconstructed. When a thousand years ago the bells rang in these temples, and the priest and the worshipper bowed before the deity, all around arose a city of golden prosperity and glittering life. The palaces of the kings are no more, nor the houses of the wealthy ; the hostel and the tavern have become dust with the dust. No trace remains of the two golden date-palms which, as tradition tells us, adorned the entrance to the religious capital of the Chandels and which gave it its old name : Kharjurvahika—bearer of date-trees. More than fifty temples have totally disappeared ; and, of course, the people who saw the pomp and pageantry, and then the decay and desertion, of Khajuraho are gone. In this forsaken garden of

erotic, even the obscene, of which, too, there is certainly a fair sprinkling among the carvings.

The lure of this aspect of the temple-art of Khajuraho is understandable. The erotic which has always had a great fascination for mankind seems to have grown into a veritable obsession of the present era. Our age is sex-hungry and lust-stricken as perhaps no other period in human history has been. As it is, contemporary interest in sexual matters is ebullient enough. But when the erotic element is found coupled with the religious, the result is an engaging enigma ; or, worse, the temple so adorned is treated as a sexual circus-show. The Western mind, especially, has an ingrained belief that religion is something chaste and ethereal, not of the earth, nor of that muddy vesture of decay, our body ; that sex is something apart from the soul, a mundane thing : necessary, perhaps, but an evil all the same ; a disgrace, something dirty, despicable—and that never the twain can meet. And yet, here at Khajuraho, these two seem to mix and mingle freely like grape-wine and Ganges-water, meet gladly like earth and sky, merge and flow one into the other like statue and stone, like a rivulet into a stream. So, Khajuraho is regarded as the home at once of Kam, the god of love and of Shiv, his enemy. This intrigues the intellectual, tickles the facile, exasperates the fussy, infuriates the prude, excites the morbid, and thrills the healthy. And all these varied and various reactions, experienced and carried back by visitor after visitor, have helped to build up around Khajuraho a rose-red, lily-white legend of passion and penance. As we shall see, not all Khajuraho sculpture is erotic. Indeed, the actual proportion of the erotic to the rest is far lower than some overheated imaginations have, on inspection, liked. But even if it were that erotic and nothing but erotic, its association with the sexual as understood normally would be an error of appraisal and a fault in judgement. What values and what attitudes went into the combination and co-ordination of these seemingly contrary and contradictory elements is a vast matter—and one which is not a monopoly of India, but belongs equally to all civilizations and religions of the world. Some aspects of this interesting issue will be dealt with later. Here it should suffice to register that the existence of such a large quantity of sexual symbolism splashed on the temple walls of Khajuraho contributes greatly to its popularity. And, apropos this, it is worth noting that one of the many explanations offered in connection with the existence of erotic sculpture on temples is that it would attract the people. The wise pundits knew that a silken tress was likely to succeed where strong ropes might fail. They recognised that Beauty and Body were also roads to release. They were certain that whatever the people came for, they would stay to pray : for they would find, as some of the present-day visitors who go to have a look at the lewd do, that these magnificent monuments sport no flashy, fleshly trash, but deep philosophy carved gracefully upon sober stone.

This digression apart, the fact remains that Khajuraho is today one of India's most talked-of places. This is not surprising. Indeed, with its gifts, it could hardly be anything less. Its edifices are regarded by experts like Fergusson as "the most beautiful in form as well as the most elegant in detail of any of the temples now standing in India."[1] Its exquisite sculpture creates a universe of beauty. And the erotic artistry portrays loves that include the sublimest as well as the loosest ; it renders graphically the

the gods, only a few silent memorials of the age lift their graceful *shikhars* into the quiet of the sky, seeking and bestowing a peace that passeth understanding. It is difficult to explain what intangibles unite with the tangibles of architecture and sculpture to invest Khajuraho with the charm it holds and the calm joy that it transmits to the visitor. Perhaps, the silence of the temples speaks a message of wisdom to the scared and harried men who go there today, men who live under the constant threat of nuclear explosions and mass destruction, men whose waking hours are one uninterrupted story of material struggle and mutual distrust, and whose sleep would have been a nightmare but for the opiates and the narcotics which brought it about. It is not possible for the men and women who live in these years of disgrace, in the sixties of the twentieth century, to imagine the life of faith and fullness, of fearlessness and true understanding, with which the air around Khajuraho's temples still seems to be saturated. It may be, therefore, that the spell of Khajuraho is not to be explained by the grandeur and grace of the architecture, nor by the exquisite and luscious sculpture, nor even by the erotic and the lascivious element there ; but, more than these, by the philosophy of delight and the wisdom of tolerance writ large in stone—a philosophy and a wisdom which taught men how to resolve the differences of the surface by understanding the reality beneath and the supra-reality above.

In all times since he began to live, man has known that he lives not by bread alone. In all times has he sought, after the food for the body had been procured, and sometimes even when that had not been procured, something more ; sought something higher, something of greater moment : something that would be nourishment for the mind and a sustenance for the soul. And whenever he has achieved this, his life on earth has had meaning and value, and a golden fringe of joy has then ornamented the slate-coloured cloud of his dull existence. Whenever, on the other hand, he has lost this, whenever he has bothered only to fill the belly, or to mate like the lower animals, he has had to contend with illusion and suffering, with doubt and death. The tragedy, however, is that for man life has often posed a choice between the acceptance of the body at the cost of the soul and the denial of the flesh for the sake of the spirit. Mind and Matter have been, seemingly, ever at war. But now and then, under a rare constellation, in a fortunate golden age, on a blessed piece of earth, men have lived as if in paradise, have known peace within and without, have reconciled the spiritual with the physical, have mixed with gods and found them like themselves, have held that human life is beautiful and good and meant for enjoyment, that all is well with God's world and man's. If such eras have been, if such people have lived, or if such pieces of land ever were, then there can be little doubt that of such eras the age of the Chandels at their zenith, when the temples of Khajuraho were built, was one ; that among such people must be counted the men and women who made these beautiful temples and who carved their religion and philosophy on these walls in such beautiful curves ; and finally, that of the lands so blessed is also the region where some of those temples still stand. In a way, almost like Vrindavan is Khajuraho. Even as that sacred grove still relays the joyous notes of the divine flute of Krishn, so the temples of Khajuraho seem to be giving out, like a rose its scent or like a diamond its light, the firm faith, the quiet and deep joy, of the men

who lived there and left for us this legacy and treasure of incalculable worth. It is this, methinks, that informs these monuments at Khajuraho with magic and which creates the spell it casts.

They say that misery-laden men have been known to weep at the sight of the Taj Mahal, at the thought of such dream-beauty existing on the same earth on which they lived their sordid lives. But what is the Taj Mahal compared to a temple like the Lingraj at Bhubaneswar, or the Kandariya Mahadev at Khajuraho? The temple is the House of God and no soulless tomb of a mere mortal. A graceful and majestic temple, church or mosque is not only a thing of beauty, but building against building, is more than beauty; it is more than ephemeral emotion: it is philosophy and religion and solace everlasting. A tomb like the Taj is just art, *emotion* crystallised as Beauty, a symbol of sorrow, a dedication to the finite, a memorial equally to the beloved and to the builder, stressing the latter's ego, flaunting his wealth, feeding his pride—and of worth only because it is greatly built, and beautifully. A great temple—or church, mosque or any other House of God—is art, of course; but it is also *devotion* crystallised as Beauty and Tranquillity; it symbolises man's longing for the Infinite, indicates his flight towards the Beyond, honours and glorifies God, marks man's surrender and God's splendour. Nay, beautiful or plain, even the meanest of fanes may confer upon the visitor both joy and peace. At one place, the mind of man strikes against the marble, and is baffled and bewildered. And at the other, the walls, albeit of stone, break asunder to reveal; and the soul is soothed, uplifted, released. There can be no other satisfactory explanation of the ever-increasing attraction of the monuments of Khajuraho. Combining beauty of form with blessedness of faith, the divine with the worldly, they create a microcosm which vies with that other veil of illusion, this universe we live in—and vies to advantage, for in the little cosmos of Khajuraho there is neither evil nor heart-ache, both of which are found, alas, so abundantly in our world where, as Keats put it,

> *"........men sit and hear each other groan;*
> *Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,*
> *Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;*
> *Where but to think is to be full of sorrow*
> *And leaden-eyed despairs,*
> *Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,*
> *Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow."*[2]

At Khajuraho Beauty still keeps her lustrous eyes, and Love, new or old, has nothing to do with pining. All art might be escapism and all religion anaesthesia, yet the happy interfusion of these two at Khajuraho makes a most welcome haven of delight and spells rest for weary souls.

# 2

# Mistress of the Moon

*Who is this maiden that has been enjoyed and (then) let go, and who with wandering glance and with garments clinging to her limbs with perspiration,*

*At dawn goes here and there, timid (and) distrustful, like a gazelle ?*

*How is this ? Has this lotus face, with its lower lip's welling nectar, been sipped by a bee ?*

*By whom has heaven been enjoyed today ? With whom has Kam (once) slain by Shiv's eye, been pleased ?*

MAYUR — ASHTAK

TO the annoyance alike of scholars and students the Indians of yore have almost consistently displayed a delightful disregard of history. For the time preceding the Muslims the sources of information about our history are especially scant. They are either the records, at times faithful but often prejudiced, left by foreigners—ambassadors, travellers, official scribes accompanying the invader—or the delectable and highly-coloured, imaginative, and at times altogether imaginary, accounts contained in indigenous myth and legend, in art and literature and in folk-lore or bardic lays. This seemingly appalling contempt for history is easily explained by the general view of life which the Indian held, and which, in a way, the Hindu still holds. The religion and philosophy of the Hindu are rooted not in Time but in Eternity. What matters to him is truth and not facts, the total view and not the partial. That which is in space and time is but illusion, a moving show, and of little consequence. To put this in the highly impressive words of Dr. Radhakrishnan, "The heart of religion is that man truly belongs to another order, and the meaning of man's life is to be found not in this world but in more than historical reality. His highest aim is release from the historical succession denoted by birth and death. So long as he is lost in the historical process without a realization of the super-historical goal, he is only 'once-born' and is liable to sorrow. God and not the world of history is the true environment of our souls."[1] Or, again, "What is the

relation of absolute being to historical becoming, of eternity to time? Is succession, history, progress, real and sufficient in its own right, or does man's deep instinct for the unchanging point to an eternal perfection which alone gives the world meaning and worth? Is the inescapable flux all, or is there anything which abides? Religious consciousness bears testimony to the reality of something behind the visible, a haunting beyond, which both attracts and disturbs, in the light of which the world of change is said to be unreal...Gaudapada argues that 'whatever is non-existent at the beginning and in the end is non-existent in the middle also.' In other words, the things of the world are not eternal. The world is *maya*, i.e. passes away, but God is eternal...Hindu thought is emphatic in asserting that the changes of the world do not affect the integrity or perfection of the Absolute."[2] And another writer, Riencourt, points out, "The Indian mind .. ..in many ways the most profound known to cultural history .....ignores systematically the metaphysical and spiritual significance of time and history."[3] It does so because reacting sharply to the distinction between Becoming and Being, it stresses the latter out of all proportion, and would ignore the former wholly. That is why "the seeker after Ultimate Truth, after the permanent and timeless, after pure Being, in other words, looks upon this unreal, transient and ephemeral world as having the 'form of Becoming' *(bhava-rupa)*. So that Becoming—the process of time, i.e., history—is essentially unreal. Since the whole spatial world of nature is caught in the inexorable flow of time, from creation to dissolution, everything becomes as unreal as the Becoming that underlies it. The phenomenal world is made of the same stuff as dreams."[4]

In any case, the Indian approach was that when a man became important enough, temporally, he could always command such concoctions as would satisfy his own ego and that of his satellites. A king, howsoever he became one, could always rely upon his hangers-on to make up all the history that anyone wanted. As art, as poetry, as paeans of praise from greed of gain, or as embroidery and embellishment for their own sake, this thing called history might make sense. But, generally, why waste time and effort in composing meaningless word-pictures of this dull, sham, earthly existence, of our passing world of illusion and decay, where success or failure comes through chance or divine pre-ordination, and where the noble-blooded are not always victorious? Whenever necessary, the fertile imagination of the poet-singer could invent lineage and descent as flattering as anyone else's, and fabricate exploits and achievements which would be the envy of the gods and the despair of future scholars.

That is how it comes about that for countless kings and dynasties of India there are few contemporary or any reliable records available. A stray sentence here and a cross-reference there are all the clues one gets to the unravelling of many an historical riddle. Even these are not always dependable because of a confusing similarity of names and titles. This is not to say that erudition has not managed to build up some sort of structure of acceptable history—though, once again, how much of these rescued facts are themselves but reconstructed fiction is another question. The point is that, by and large, it is legend and poetry which provide much of the information that we have. As is well known, one of the most illustrious examples of the manufacture of history is *Prithviraj Raso* in which is interwoven, as part of the life and history of Prithviraj

Chauhan, such an abundance of authentic-sounding but entirely false details that generations of scholarly sifters might do nothing except engage in the work of separating the grain from the chaff and yet be none the wiser. And what is true in the case of a king as great as Prithviraj and of his dynasty is true also of many a dazzling raja or royal family including the Chandels who ruled over Khajuraho and built its magnificent temples.

The legendary part of the story of these kings of Khajuraho is given mainly in the *Mahoba Khand* of *Prihviraj Raso*. There are other references to the romantic tale but this is the most important as it is the most detailed account of the otherwise obscure origin of this Rajput clan which claimed kinship with the Moon. According to this tale, the descent of the dynasty is traced to the lunar deity through a certain Hemvati. This beautiful mortal became the mistress of the Moon who is not the chaste Diana of the West for the Indian, but is a masculine deity in no way different from the run of the male divinities of any mythology. As in the case of the more celebrated tale of the Sun-god and Kunti—mother of the Pandavs—from whose liaison sprang Karan, the mighty hero of the *Mahabharat*, so from the love-play of the divine *Nishakar* and the *apsara*-like Hemvati was born Chandrvarman, the illustrious conqueror and the founder of the Chandel dynasty.

The tale is told with relish and in rich detail by the bard—supposed to be Chand Bardai, but this whole composition is regarded by scholars as an interpolation of a much later date. Chand is giving to the Tomar Raja Anangpal an account, in epic style, of the origin of the Chandels. The context is the lineage of Parmal of Mahoba, himself of Chandel blood, whose great battle against Prithviraj Chauhan is—thanks to the heroic exploits of the youngsters, Alha and Udal—one of the most celebrated exploits in the Rajput annals. After mentioning two other predecessor-dynasties, namely the Gauds and the Gaharwars, the poet takes up the Chandel dynasty whose ancestress Hemvati was the daughter of one Hemraj, family priest to the Gaharwar ruler, Indrjit. Dazzlingly lovely and highly accomplished in manner and deportment, this girl had somehow merited the curse of Indr and had been widowed at an early age. But as she grew up, the bud bloomed into a beautiful blossom and at sixteen she looked a most splendid nymph. One summer night, feeling restless and fraught with strange desires, she wandered out to a lotus-filled pond called *Rati-Talab*, and bathing therein she sought coolth and refreshment. While she lay naked and relaxed in the sparkling waters, the sky-roving Moon-god, friend of the lotus-lilies, saw that exquisite and enchanting lady, and felt exceedingly delighted. Struck with Kam's arrow, down he descended on to the earth and drawing near unto that lovely mortal embraced and joined himself with her. With her he sported in love through the night; but when the day began to break and the god prepared to depart, the maiden upbraided him for having thus deflowered her. He, the cruel one, had, through illicit union, ruined her life, disgraced and disfigured her purity and impaired her fair fame. Then, when she threatened him with curses, the Moon-god said, "Curse me not, O Maiden. Rather, be happy that your offspring will be a king. He will be a mighty ruler enjoying the whole world and from him will spread out thousand branches."[5] This typical

hyperbole pacified and consoled the unhappy woman to some extent; but she was still worried about the social stigma which, because of her moral aberration, would stain her and her family's name. She was a widow. How was she to get over the consequences of her union with the divine seducer ? And so, filled with shame, she cried to the Moon-god, "How shall my dishonour be effaced ? I am but a wretched widow even if yet young in years." The cool-rayed Lord of the Constellations replied, "Fear not. Your son will be born on the bank of the Karnavati river, and he will be a valiant hero. Then go to Khajjurapura (Khajuraho), offer gifts and perform sacrifices. He will reign in Mahoba with extensive possessions acquired by defeating other monarchs through the efforts of his four-fold army. He will possess a philosopher's stone which will turn iron into gold. He will build numerous temples and excavate lakes and tanks. He will build a fortress at holy Kalinjar." These were fetching promises, indeed, and very gladdening for the heart of a would be mother. Nevertheless Hemvati was still in an agony of doubt and dismay. Her sense of guilt would not leave her, and she cried : "You would make my son a king, but I shall have to suffer in hell, all the same." Then the gentle god prescribed some expiatory rites: "When your son is sixteen, he will perform a *yagya* whereby your sin will be washed away. Therefore, Hemvati, there is nothing to fear. Your son will be a Kshatriya of a high order." And thereafter the divine lover disappeared.

Thus left to her own devices, Hemvati quit her home at Kashi and repaired to Kalinjar. She stayed there for four months, taking purificatory baths and offering sacrifices. Then she went to a village where, at the house of the village headman, she gave birth to a son. The child, Chandrvarman by name, was like another moon. At his birth which took place on Monday, the eleventh day of the waxing moon in the month of Madhav, heavenly damsels sounded notes of joy and performed auspicious ceremonies. His divine father, the Moon-god, made himself manifest, and reiterated the prophecy. But he warned Hemvati that the dynasty which his son would found would continue to rule only as long as the rulers retained the surname 'Varman'. Brihaspati, the preceptor of the gods, came and drew up the horoscope of the infant, and a festival was held by the Moon-god in honour of the event as well as the assembled.

Time passed and Chandrvarman grew to be sixteen. Brave and bold and full of strength, he killed a tiger with a stone, and a lion, twelve cubits long, with equal ease. Hemvati was filled with joy at this and evoked the presence of the Moon-god by reciting a hymn. The deity appeared and fondly kissed and blessed his son. He also gave him a touchstone which he had brought with him. Then Chandrvarman was duly consecrated king at Khajuraho, and almost all the gods made their appearance and bestowed their blessings on him. "The God of Wealth came with all his forces and presented them to Chandrvarman He was also taught polity by the three gods, *viz.*, Kubera, the Dhanpati, Brahaspati, the preceptor of gods, and the Moon-god himself."*

The story proceeds apace and at the celebration of Chandrvarman's marriage the Moon-god warned him yet again that the surname 'Varman' should never be discarded. Equipped as he was with the wealth-producing touchstone and other divine gifts, Chandrvarman achieved a series of brilliant victories and accomplished many feats. He

first occupied the fort of Kalinjar and then, after due worship of the god Nilkanth and the gifting of much wealth—'a hundred crore of gold coins'—to Brahmins and ascetics, he took to extending his kingly possessions. The Gaharwars, were frightened by his mighty army and fled away so that their dominion of Kashi was added to the Chandel kingdom. He built a strong fortress at Kalinjar, the sanctity of which place was such that a bath there could earn more merit than a visit to heavenly regions. Then, with his queen, the king visited Khajuraho that he might sit at the feet of his mother. She recounted to him the mental agony and the spiritual torture she had gone through that he might be, and desired that her son should perform the *Bhandya Yagya*, as prescribed by his father, which would absolve her of her sin. Further, she required him to construct eighty-five temples and lakes and gardens near-by, and to give liberally to the Brahmins. Chandrvarman dutifully carried out his mother's directions with due rite and ceremony. For the work of temple-construction, he called upon the Divine Builder, Vishvkarma, who in less than four hours, built all the eighty-five fanes. Then was the guilt of Hemvati expiated and her sin washed away ; and, radiant and pure, she hied straight to heaven. Chandrvarman went on to build a new capital at Mahoba, from where, in due course, and centuries after, Parmal would issue forth in battle array to oppose Prithviraj—the Prithviraj of the *Raso* which contains this amazing description.

A Hindi manuscript purporting to give the family history of the Chandel Thakurs of Sheorajpur gives the account thus :

"Hemawati was daughter of Indarjit, Gahlwar Thakur, Raja of Banaras. With her at midnight the moon had dalliance : she awoke when she recovered her senses, and saw the Moon returning to his own place. She was about to curse him, and said—'I am not a Gautam woman', when he replied—'The curse of Sri Krishna has been fulfilled , your son will become very great, and his kingdom will extend from sunset to sunrise.' Hemawati said-'Tell me that spell by which my sin may be absolved.' Chandra said—'You will have a son, and he will be your absolution', and he gave her this spell—'Go to Asu, near Kalinagar, and there dwell. When within a short time of being delivered, cross the river Kin, and go to Khajrain, where Chintaman Banya dwells, and live there with him. Your son shall perform a great sacrifice. In this iron age sacrifices are not perfect. I will appear as a Brahman and complete the sacrifice : then your absolution will be perfect."[7]

Another version of this legend makes Hemvati the daughter of Mani Ram, priest to the king of Kalinjar.[8] Through a mistake in his calculations, he had communicated to the king that a particular day was *purnmasi*, the day of the full moon, and not the dark night which it turned out to be. In her concern for her father's reputation, the fair daughter prayed to the god to make his appearance in full splendour. The god was gracious enough to help uphold the word of the priest but, as price for the favour, ravished the damsel. The sorrowing father was so shame-stricken that he cursed himself and was turned into a stone (said to have been discovered in a village in Hamirpur District) and was worshipped by the Chandel rulers as 'Maniya Dev,' their tutelary deity. The girl, poor soul, wandered about as a lost creature and gave birth to a son, the sage Chandratreya, who became the progenitor of the clan.

Of course, all these stories, however romantic their content, are, to quote Smith, "silly". Yet these legends might provide clues and starting points of much value. If nothing else, they are, as Smith says in his article, *The History and Coinage of the Chandel Dynasty*, "an implied admission that the pedigree of the clan required explanation which was best attained by including it in the group of Moon-descended Rajputs, and adding respectability by inventing a Brahman ancestress." In the opinion of this authority the Chandels were of aboriginal stock. "As a matter of fact," he continues, "the Chandels are still regarded as a clan of impure descent. It seems quite clear that their ancestors were not immigrants from the North-West, and had nothing to do with the Huns, and such people, who appear to be largely represented by the 'fire descended' Rajputs, the Chauhans, and others. The indications are fairly distinct that the Chandel clan originated in the midst of Gonds, with whom other similar tribes were intermixed."[9] R.V. Russell is inclined to regard the Bhars as the ancestors of the dynasty since they were famous builders and to them, as Elliot remarks, "common tradition assigns the possessions of the whole tract from Gorakhpur to Bundelkhand and Saugar; and many old stone forts, embankments and subterranean caverns in Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Jounpur, Mirzapur and Allahabad, which are ascribed to them, would seem to indicate no inconsiderable advance in civilization."[10]

Whereas we shall take up the examination of the Gond or Bhar theory a little later, let us note first the rather intriguing Brahmin ancestry of these Moon-descended Rajputs. Indeed, Anangpal himself is stated to have questioned the bard as to how a Kshatriya caste could have a Brahmin ancestor, to which question all the answer the poet could give was the story itself. Certainly, as S. K. Mitra writes in his *Early Rulers of Khajuraho* (from whose translation of the *Mahoba Khand* verses much of the story above has been paraphrased), "instances of Brahmins becoming Ksatriyas (i.e. Brahma-Ksatriyas) on assumption of royal power were not unknown. But, the case of the Chandellas was evidently not similar to them. Otherwise, the poet would not have experienced so much difficulty in giving a direct answer to the question of the Tomar king."[11] What exactly this case was is, of course, any body's guess, but it appears that the situation was one of a tussle between two parties one of which wanted to establish, if not the supremacy, at least the stamp of the Brahmins. Dr. Ishwari Prasad says in his comment on Smith's comment quoted above · "It is a matter on which there is much conflict of opinion and hence it is not easy to come to any definite conclusion. The Chandela Khyatas ascribe a Brahman origin to them, while at the same time the Chandelas claim a Rathor pedigree."[12] It would be stretching a point too far to suggest that the story reflects the then prevailing social-cum-religious situation and indicates the struggle between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas, or may be, a solution of it, even a kind of compromise; but the insistence on retaining the 'Varman' surname, on never forgetting the Brahmin blood that flowed in the Chandel veins, must have had some significance, and should not be lightly dismissed. Again, does not the fact that neither the Brahmin nor the Kshatriya should blush over the illicit union between the god and the maiden, indicate the broad-mindedness and tolerance—or, as some would say, laxity-in respect of piety and morality which are such well-known

characteristics of medieval Hinduism? Surely a dynasty whose own origin lay in a loose liaison was not going to be squeamish over standards of conduct. By the same token, if a deity could do that which he did to their ancestress, the temple-walls might freely flaunt the pursuit and practice of love.

To revert, however, to the legend. Assuming that the origin of the Chandel line was both dark as well as shady, and that the old trick of many a legend, of a divine visitation, was being used to explain away the awkward fruit of an earlier secret pleasure, the question of the identity of the deity of the story still remains. Since the Moon appeared several times, he could not have been far, and much could be construed in favour of some tribal chieftain who chanced to see the young Brahmin lady and was enamoured of her, and behaved as described in the legend ; but he was one who probably did not feel strong enough to incur the displeasure of the Gaharwar king by running away with the fair daughter of the royal priest. However, leaving fancy to the fanciful, let us try to think with the historian. The consensus of opinion of scholars now seems to be that the numinous part of the story of the Chandels is only a ruse to conceal their real origin, that indeed "the Chandela clan originated in the midst of Gonds, with whom other similar tribes were inter-mixed."[13] Nay, the mention of the Gauds, then the Gaharwars, and then the Chandels in the *Raso* legend, might very well indicate the identity, in that order, of the father, the mother, and the child. Further, some scholars have pointed out that the aboriginal Gonds of Central India should not be confused with the Gonds of the Gangetic Valley, so that Smith's statement needs modification. That is to say that the Chandel prince was not the offspring of a union between a highly cultivated Brahmin girl and a savage root-eating, head-hunting satyr. Unlawful the union might well have been, but it was not of bloods that were so violently differentiated in count and category that the result would suffice to license all that riotous display on the temple-walls centuries later. On the other hand, it might have been an illegitimate Gond or Bhar who through his prowess and valour carved a little principality for himself and his descendants, and whose descendants, on adding to it, found themselves important enough to desire a nobler name and lineage. That, after all, is the true use of all such legends, and a healthy Gond might well be depended upon for scoring a point over the Brahmins by making one of their daughters the defaulting enchantress. This would help keep them in their place whenever the king might seek a little latitude in the matter of his own pleasures. But clumsy as the story is, it is of a pattern with most legends of the kind that have been fabricated and interwoven into the texture of tradition, which are supposed to illuminate the uncertain origin of many a Rajput dynasty of Northern India. That the Chandels have a rather ill-fitting and faulty tale to tell does not detract from the fact that their descent from the Moon—as descents among the Rajputs went—was not disputed. There are several variants of the dynastic name and slightly differing versions of the main legend, but generally the inscriptions of the dynasty and current traditions bear out the claim of their lunar descent and kinship. The variations of the clan's name, Chandel, Chandrel or Chandratreya are all surface differences of spelling or Sanskritization of the same word, and hardly matter. Whether Hemvati was or was not the mistress of the Moon,

in history the Chandels count among the Moon-descended Rajputs. At least this much is confirmed by the earliest available record of a Khajuraho inscription which states, rather laconically, that in the family of the sage Chandratreya—whom the renowned sage Atri begat—was born Nannuk, the first king of the dynasty.

Before we move from story to history, let us make a passing reference to one very important point regarding this fascinating legend. In the vast ocean of the amours of the Hindu gods this episode is just one drop; it is no more than a fleeting moment in the divine love-play. However, it has one singular distinction. Whereas many another sinner has expiated his sin through the building of temples, our heroine seems to have gone further. She had her misdeed carved on the walls making, as it were, a public confession of her guilt. As Elliot puts it: "In the Prithviraj Rayasa mention is made of a Brahman woman, Hemavati by name, who had committed a little *faux pas* with the moon in human shape, and, as a self-imposed punishment for her indiscretion, held a Banda Jag, a part of which ceremony consists in sculpturing indecent representations on the walls of temples, and holding up one's foibles to the disgust and ridicule of the world."[14] Of course, this is but one of the many wild shots at explaining the existence of the erotic element at Khajuraho, and few take this proferred justification seriously. But all this is part of a much larger issue which will come up for consideration later on.

# 3

# The Chandels of Khajuraho

*Prolific, thousand-eyed, and undecaying, a horse with seven reins, Time bears us onward.*

*Sages inspired with holy knowledge mount him : his chariot wheels are all the worlds of creatures.*

*This Time hath seven rolling wheels and seven naves immortality is the chariot's axle.*

*This Time brings hitherward all worlds about us : as primal deity is he entreated*

*On Time is laid an overflowing beaker ; this we behold in many a place appearing*

*He carries from us all these worlds of creatures. They call him Kal in the loftiest heaven*

ATHARV VED HYMN TO KAL

TODAY, it is no longer possible for anyone, however fanatical in faith, however steeped in superstition, to believe in such moonshine fables as those associated with the Chandels' origin. The Moon, poor little thing, to which man is already directing his flight and on which he hopes to land in the near future, could hardly have had anything to do with the founding of any dynasty, Rajput or non-Rajput. And although we must guard against judging the beliefs and actions of former generations by the light, or darkness, of our own times, in this case, at least, it were best to take up the ascertained and the ascertainable ; to begin, that is to say, with Nannuk whom the records proclaim as the first king of the Chandels.

This does not mean that, so far as the Chandel story is concerned, all is smooth sailing thenceforward. As has been remarked earlier, that is just not possible with Hindu history. The medieval period, in which we are at present interested, is an

especially unlit patch, so that historian after historian is dismayed and can do naught but gloss it with vain regret or with a smartly worded generalisation. In respect of native sources, all that is available is the *Rajtarangini*, of the Kashmiri poet Kalhan, which comprises "Hindu India's almost sole contribution" to history; and even this was composed in the twelfth century. Again, Al-Biruni's splendid account of India is an early eleventh-century document. So, apart from inscriptions and bardic traditions, or a play like Rajshekhar's *Karpurmanjari* and an Arab account of India supposed to have been composed about A.D. 850, there is little else which could furnish information on the vast tangle of post-Harsh and pre-Mahmud history. The technique usually adopted for dealing with this period is the one which Rawlinson employs : "With the death of Harsha in 648, the curtain once more descends upon Northern India : when it again rises two centuries later the scene is radically changed."[1] That is, the Rajputs appear and, amongst them, the Chandels. Or, to quote from a more detailed study of the subject, *The Age of Imperial Kanauj*, "After the break-up of the Pratihar Empire a number of dynasties rose to power in Central and Western India. One of them, known as Chandella or Chandratreya, held sway over the country now called Bundelkhand."[2] And—it must be added in fairness—the writers are not being clever. There simply is no highway nor byway leading into or out of this wood.

Historically speaking, then, the Chandels must be grouped with the other thirty-five Rajput clans who traced their descent from the Sun, the Moon or the Sacred Fire. There is now a near-unanimity of view about all these Rajputs which is summed up admirably by Rawlinson thus : "Modern research seems to show that they (the Rajputs) are mainly the descendants of the Gurjara, Huna and other Central Asian tribes who found their way across the north-west frontier in the fifth and sixth centuries. These invaders carved out kingdoms for themselves and eventually settled down in the country, taking Hindu wives ; the ruling classes had no difficulty in persuading obsequious Brahmins to admit them into the Hindu fold, and to provide them with genealogies going back to the heroic times, very much as Virgil and Livy traced the ancestry of the founders of the Roman Empire back to the heroes of the Trojan War. Confirmation for the theory of the foreign origin of many of these clans is found in the Puranic legend about the creation of the Agnikula or Fire-born Rajputs. When Parasurama, 'Rama with the axe', had, at the behest of the Brahmins, destroyed the ancient Kshatriyas, the land was left masterless, whereupon the gods repaired to Mount Abu in Southern Rajputana, and there from the sacred firepit produced the four 'fire-born' clans, the Powar, the Parihar, the Chauhan and the Solanki. There is little doubt that here we have an allegorical account of the rite by which the foreign chieftains were initiated into Hinduism. It is interesting to note that the destruction of the original Kshatriya caste is admitted. Other Rajput clans, such as the Chandel, appear to have originated in indigenous tribes like the Gonds, who rose to power and were similarly ennobled and admitted into the Hindu fold."[3]

Of the four main clans of Rajputs mentioned above, the Parihars, or the Pratihars as they are usually styled, built up a powerful kingdom in Gujarat with their capital near Abu. From there, branches of these Gurjar-Pratihars spread out in other directions,

so that around the second half of the eighth century they were able to establish sway over parts of Northern India. Ever since Harsh Vardhan's death this part of the country had passed through darkness and confusion; yet the covetous eyes of almost everybody were on the fertile Gangetic plain and on that glittering prize, the celebrated city of Kanauj. In the centuries that followed the dissolution of Harsh's empire three powerful dynasties rose to contend for supremacy in this region. These were the Pratihars mentioned already, the Pals of Bengal and the Rashtrakuts of the South. These rich tracts of Northern India were often changing hands among these or their vassals depending some time upon the valour and wisdom of individual kings and, at other times, on the whims of fickle Fortune. But, by and large, the Pratihars enjoyed about a hundred and fifty years of rule at imperial Kanauj. After Nagbhatt and Vatsraj, the founders of this Northern empire, several important kings figure in the history of this epoch. Among these there are such well-known rulers as Nagbhatt II, Mihir Bhoj and Mahendrpal. Their empires were large and although the extent varied with the fortunes of the rulers, it always included the territories which formed the kingdom of the Chandels of Khajuraho. The earlier members of this dynasty, from Nannuk onwards till Harsh, were but vassals of the Pratihars ; it was only when the Pratihar empire weakened and disintegrated that, like several other new powers, the Chandels proclaimed themselves independent. But this was nearly a century and a half after history had taken note of the existence of the Chandels. During this period—it must be admitted to their great credit—they were most loyal in their homage and unsparing in their service to their overlords the Pratihars. On their part, the Pratihars rendered an indirect service to the Chandels and many other kings and clans of Central India by keeping the Muslim aggressor at bay, and by standing as the bulwark of India's defence against this menace from the Middle East. This made for a secure region where, other favourable circumstances permitting, art and culture could flourish and that sense of beauty and values develop which we find associated with the Chandels. Again, and fortunately, when the Iconoclast did penetrate in to these central regions of India, he was either pacified or was content to spare Khajuraho which had by that time lost its earlier political importance and been superseded by the ill-starred Kalinjar. But these various links of the story need not be pieced together at this stage, for poor Nannuk, modest founder of the Chandel Dynasty, has been awaiting attention.

As stated above, not much that is authentic and reliable is known about this man. According to information available in inscriptions, he was chief of his clan in the first quarter of the ninth century. Additionally, epigraphic records would indicate that Khajuraho—then called Kharjurvahika, Bearer of Dates or Kharjurvatika, Garden of Dates—was the stronghold of Nannuk and his people, and that the early rulers of the dynasty were feudatories to the Pratihars of Kanauj whose kingdom extended, under Nagbhatt II, up to Kalinjar, forty miles east of Khajuraho. Some of the inscriptions describe him and his exploits in the traditional style, so that he is mentioned as *bhunrip* and *mahipati* and is regarded as 'a touchstone to test the worth of the gold of the regal order', *(Kshatra-suvarnna-saranikashagrava)* and as 'one who playfully decorated the faces of the women of the quarters with the sandal of his fame' *(Yashaschandana-kridalankrta*

*dikpurandhri-vadana)* and as 'one whose skill in the use of the bow and arrow reminded people of the great Epic hero, Arjuna.' But all this does not amount to much, and there is little definite data on which to build his biography or determine his bravery. Yet, there is about his name a sense of quiet and rest and dignity which befits decent folk. And, somehow, the attempt of some of his descendants to link their lineage with the Moon seems as pompous and pointless as that of scholars to prove that this Nannuk of history is the Chandratreya of the legend. There is hardly any need for that. For, considering "When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman ?" Nannuk and his dynasty had a much better start. He was a chief, even though, a vassal of the Pratihars ; a ruler, even if of the petty little principality of Khajuraho.

Nannuk was succeeded by his son Vakpati who probably ruled during the second quarter of the ninth century, and was a contemporary of the celebrated Pratihar raja, Mihir Bhoj. This king Bhoj had to fight many battles against the two deadly enemies of the Pratihars, the Pal Devpal and the Kalchuri Kokal I. As a vassal of the Pratihars, the chieftain of Khajuraho must have often assisted in the battle-field, and the inscription mentions the Vindhya Hills, one of the more frequent scenes of warfare, as the 'pleasure-mount' *(Krida-giri)* of Vakpati. It has been suggested on the basis of this inscription that Vakpati managed to extend his territory so as to include some hills connected with the Vindhyas but, as Mitra remarks, "the passage need not necessarily be taken as indicating any definite advance of territorial power..."[4]

Vakpati had two sons, Jaishakti and Vijaishakti. They succeeded him, one after the other, and, both being valiant princes, between them they added considerably to their dominion. Jaishakti, who came first, was also called Jaijak and from this the kingdom ruled by the Chandels acquired the name of Jaijakbhukti. A daughter of Jaishakti is said to have been given in marriage to Kokal I. This is intriguing for in the circumstances it suggests disloyalty to the Kanauj kings. Or was it sound political wisdom which would keep one more frontier of Jaijakbhukti secure against aggression ? Since Jaijak had only this daughter and no son, he was followed on the throne by Vijaishakti who undertook some expeditions and, according to Khajuraho inscriptions, subdued the neighbouring areas. In fact, he is credited with having "reached even the southernmost point of India." This seemingly harmless phrase is a veritable hornet's nest for historians and scholars and quite a controversy rages over its exact implications. Since the Sanskrit original indicates that these expeditions were undertaken to help a friend, it is pertinent to inquire as to who this friend, or ally, was. Normally this epithet would have applied to the Pratihar king, but there is no record of any Pratihar expedition to the South wherein the Chandels took any part. Dr. R. C. Majumdar is of the view that Vijaishakti might have assisted Devpal in a southern expedition. Indeed, according to him, "the Chandellas had helped Devapala in his fight against Bhoja (Pratihara) and were rewarded, after the latter's defeat, with the sovereignty of the territory near Khajuraho, perhaps under the suzerainty of Devapala."[5] This would mean that the Pratihars were not the overlords of the Chandels, that the latter were free to help the former's deadly enemies. However, the thread of evidence is too slender to support such a thesis and, as S. K. Mitra says, "it is difficult to accept the

view that the early Candella rulers were feudatories of the Palas of Bengal."[6] Yet such is the state of confusion which prevails in this respect that Mitra is obliged to strike a compromise between his stand and that of Dr. Majumdar to the effect that through his submission to the overlordship of the Pratihars, the greatest power in Northern India in his time, Jaishakti won a recognised status for his family. But this must have happened sometime after Vijaishakti's expedition to the South, when he might have been assisting the Pals as suggested by Dr. Majumdar.[7]

All this seems as confused as it is confusing. And yet there need be no jugglery to fit history into a mould. The simple story appears to be that for nearly fifty years after Nannuk set up his little dominion, he and his successors profited from whatever political opportunities came along. They were the feudatories of one or the other of the powers contending for supremacy around them, according to the favours or reverses Fortune apportioned to these. When the Pals under kings like Dharmpal and Devpal came out stronger, the Chandels professed allegiance to them and, naturally, would march with them against any of their foes, including the Pratihars. On the other hand, when a Nagbhatt II or Bhoj, of the Pratihars, had the upper hand, the political sagacity of such small fry as the Chandel chieftains would dictate that they start hunting with the erstwhile hunted. And why not ? Whether or not governed in theory by nicely-worded and high-sounding principles, in practice politics is often a game of expediency. Existence for a small nation or a little kingdom is a difficult matter under any conditions ; the survival of such a unit as that of the Chandels in those medieval times was certainly no jest.

To revert to the brothers, Jai and Vijai, whose exploits and deeds of bravery are often sung in ballads as if the two were joint rulers, or one entity like Alha and Udal of later days. Whatever the element of poetic exaggeration in the inscriptions, there is no doubt that these two steered the affairs of the Chandels successfully enough for the tribe to have gained a definite foothold in the Bundelkhand region. As has been observed earlier, since the time of Jaishakti, one of the names—in fact, the more common name and one which historians mention again and again—of the Chandel territory was Jaijakbhukti, *bhukti* being the administrative term for a division. Also, it was during the time of these brothers that the nucleus of their dominion was more or less fixed, and whether they remained feudatories of the Pals or recognised the Pratihars as their overlords—or, later on, grew to be independent of either—the Chandel kingdom always included the area these brothers held. Eventually the dynasty became important enough to be valued for its allegiance and support. Then, apart from political alliances, those of blood and kinship began to be sought, so that when Kalchuri Kokal I, the Chedi king, married Natta, the daughter of Jaishakti, both dynasties fully appreciated the mutual advantages of such a step.

Vijaishakti was succeeded by his son Rahil who is probably the ruler associated with the village Rahilya located two miles south-west of Mahoba in the Hamirpur District. He is also credited with the construction of a tank known as *Rahilyasagar*, as well as of the temple, now in ruins, which stands on its banks. As Dr. Ganguly rightly points out, "If Rahila-Varma is identical with the Chandella king of the name, Mahoba, the

ancient Mahotsavanagara, must have been included in the Chandella kingdom during this period."[8] There can be little doubt about this as later inscriptions and records mention the conquest of Kalinjar and Gwalior etc., but not of Mahoba, which even the legendary account, given in an earlier chapter, ascribed to the Prince Chandratreya. Probably, Rahil ruled during the last two decades of the ninth century and was succeeded by his son Harshdev who came to the throne around A.D. 900.

Harshdev's is a notable name in the story of the Chandels. In the twenty-five years or so for which he was the ruler, he extended his territory and enhanced the prestige of the dynasty. He was the first Chandel prince who counted in the general history of those times. When, during his reign, the Rashtrakut king, Indr III, invaded and captured Kanauj, it was Harsh who helped the Pratihar Mahipal I—or Kshitipal—to regain the throne of Kanauj. This memorable event took place around A.D. 915 and was presumably commemorated by Harsh with the construction of the Matangeshwar temple. Naturally, a military exploit of this kind, and such invaluable assistance, added greatly to the credit and glory of the Chandels and they became a dynasty of some status. Harsh consolidated his position further by marrying Kanchuka, a princess of a Chahman clan of the Malwa region.

Harshdev died in *c.* A.D. 925 when his illustrious son Yashovarman, known also as Lakshvarman, ascended the throne. Finding the Pratihar and Rashtrakut kingdoms beginning to decline, Yashovarman decided to defy their authority. He set up as an independent king and began to attack the dominions of the Rashtrakuts. Many are the military conquests which are recorded with eloquence and eulogy in several inscriptions. "When dust rose," reads one account, "on the expeditions of his forces, the river of Heaven had its current diverted midway by the embankments formed in it ; the sun, having its lustre covered, was pleasant like a mirror ; seeing the sky covered with clouds the elephants of the Lord of the gods became delighted and the swans eagerly looked upwards, and a thousand eyes of averted enemies became closed."[9] Again, "in battle the impetuous massive arms of that ocean of regal splendour engaged in conquering the earth did not cease to itch even though the enemies had clearly disappeared nobody knew whither."[10] Another verse speaks of him as one "Who was a sword to (cut down) the Gaudas, as if they were mere pleasure-creepers ; equalled the forces of the Khasas, and carried off the treasures of the Kosalas ; before whom perished the Kashmiri warriors ; who weakened the Mithilas, and (was) as it were a God of Death to the Malavas ; who brought distress to the shameful Cedis ; who was to the Kurus what a storm is to the trees, and a scorching fire to the Gurjjaras."[11] Obviously there is an admixture of much poetic hyperbole in all this, and some of the items like the reference to the Kashmiri warriors are clearly figments of fancy. Even so, there is no questioning the fact that Lakshvarman engaged himself in many an expedition and proved himself an able general and a brave warrior. He captured Kalinjar and extended the frontiers of his kingdom both in the north and the south ; he reached the banks of the Yamuna in one direction and the borders of the Chedi and Malwa in the other. The Chandels were now a great power and it was meet that Yashovarman should be grateful to the gods for their favour. Though tolerant of all sects, he himself was a

votary of Vishnu, and erected the magnificent Lakshman temple, the golden pinnacles of which "illuminated the sky and became, it is said, the object of attraction for even the inhabitants of the heaven."[12] The idol which was installed in this temple is believed to have been received by him as a gift from Devpal, the son of Herambpal, who had got it in exchange for elephants and horses from Sahi, the king of the Kirs, near Kashmir, to whom it had been given by the Lord of Bhotnath (Tibet) who had himself found it at Mount Kailash ! And so, with Yashovarman set in the era of an independent Chandel kingdom as well as one of such temple-building as was to provide to the world several splendid specimens of religious art.

Yashovarman had two wives, and a son from each. According to one Khajuraho inscription, the name of one of his queens was Puppadevi. This lady—pious as the holy Narmada ; equal to Shachi, wife of Indr, the lord of the gods—was the mother of Dhangdev, who succeeded his father. Another son called Krishnapa, or Krishnraj, is mentioned in some inscriptions but there is precious little known about him beyond the surmise that he did not dispute the succession of his half-brother.

Dhangdev came to the throne in *c.* A.D. 954, and adorned it till the end of the century, until A.D. 1002, when he voluntarily relinquished both his throne and his life. His reign is one long stretch of glory and the Chandels reached the zenith of their power and prosperity during this period. His father had made the dynasty strong and independent and Dhang, with no consciousness of having been anything but king in his own right, born to the manner as it were, was equal, and more than equal, to the role he was called upon to play. In the realm of arms he was to gain the reputation of being the "equal of Hammir"; in that of the arts, such was the number and magnificence of the fanes which were put up in his time that one half of Khajuraho's temple treasure is his gift to posterity. Few kings have been so blessed as he was ; and few have been, in their turn, so munificent.

Like many other dates in our story, that of Yashovarman's passing away and of Dhang's accession is also a matter of scholarly conjecture. An item regarded as of much value in this respect is the celebrated stone inscription of Yashovarman dated V.S. 1011 (A.D. 954). The historians have inferred from this that Dhang must have succeeded his father before that year. Composed in Yashovarman's time, but possibly inscribed in that of Dhang, the inscription, which is considered to be "the earliest proof of Chandel occupation of Khajuraho," gives a lengthy and up-to-date record of the dynasty. It eulogises the qualities and exploits of Dhang and his forebears and indicates that Dhang was already, at that time, renowned in the field of war Verse 44 reads : "As the moon (arose) from the great ocean, so was born to him (Yashovarman) a son, causing joy to the people, the illustrious Dhanga, who by his arms has firmly established his upright rule over the earth, whose praise is sung by champions before whom the hosts of enemies are perishing in battle (and) whose two feet are constantly worshipped with garlands, fallen down from the crowns of princes who bow down (before him)..."[13]

Verse 45 then gives the extent of his empire : "(he is the one who) playfully acquired by the action of his long and strong arms, as far as Kalanjara, and as far as

Bhasvat (Bhilsa or Vidisha, near Bhopal) situated on the banks of the river of Malava, from here also to the bank of the river Kalindi, and from here also to the frontiers of the Cedi country, and even as far as that mountain called Gopa (Gwalior) which is the unique abode of marvel!"[14]

This last is a significant detail, this mention of Gopa, the modern Gwalior, which is claimed as forming a part of the Chandel kingdom. The question is as to when and from whom this place was conquered. Supposedly belonging to the Pratihars, Gwalior could not have been taken from them as the same inscription acknowledges, towards the end , the overlordship of this dynasty by stating that "...while the illustrious Vinayakapaladeva is protecting the earth, the earth is not taken possession of by the enemies, who have been annihilated."[15] Confusion on this point is further confounded by evidence in the historical records of those times regarding the conquest of Gwalior by the Kachchapghat Vajrdaman. Different theories have been advanced to explain this. Dr. D.C. Ganguly thinks that Dhang "obviously inherited this Kingdom from his father Yashovarman. He could not, however, retain Gwalior for a long time as some time before A.D. 977 Vajradaman, son of Lakshmana, of the Kachchhapaghata family invaded Gwalior and forced Dhanga and his overlord, who seems to have been the Pratihara Vijayapala, to surrender it to him. It is claimed that Vajradaman conquered Gopagiri by defeating the king of Gadhinagara, i.e., Kanauj. A stone inscription of the reign of the *Maharajadhiraja* Vajradaman, dated V.S. 1034 (A.D. 977) has been found at Gwalior."[16]

Dr. H.C. Ray is of the view that the Kachchapghat rulers were at first feudatories of the imperial Gurjar Pratihars till they gained mastery of the Gwalior Fort by defeating the ruler of Kanauj whom he identifies as Vijaipal. But very soon they had to surrender to the rising power of the Chandels. Disagreeing with both, Dr. Mitra supposes Vajrdaman's reign as beginning from A.D. 950, and offers the following explanation. " 'the mountain called Gopagiri' came to be included within the Candella State as early as 954 A.D. If the Candellas conquered it before 954 A.D., how could Vajradaman conquer it from the Pratiharas ? There is no evidence to show that the Candellas lost the Gwalior Fort to the Gurjara-Pratiharas between 954 and 977 A.D., so that it might have been possible for Vajradaman to conquer it again from the latter. Hence it must be concluded that the Candella episode and the Kacchapaghata episode connected with the conquest of Gopadri are not separate stories, but that they refer to a single event in which the Candellas and the Kacchapaghatas were closely associated together. In short, the Fort was occupied by Vajradaman for the Candellas."[17]

Such little disagreements apart, there is complete unanimity of view in respect of Dhang's greatness as a ruler. He not only consolidated whatever his father bequeathed to him but greatly expanded the territory under the Chandel rule. The Pratihar power was declining and Dhang annexed the eastern part of their kingdom lying to the north of the Yamuna. Many expeditions of his to several other regions are recorded. Thus he is credited with invasions of several southern as well as eastern kingdoms including Koshal, Krath, Kuntal, Simhal, Andhr, Ang and Radh. Possibly there is some exaggeration in the claims which the inscriptions contain, yet there is no gainsaying the

fact that he proved himself to be a warrior of repute and power. The Chandels were now wholly independent and their king styled himself *Maharajadhiraj Kalinjaradhipati*, Lord of Kalinjar.

This does not mean that there is any shift in the importance of Khajuraho. Some historians make out that up to the accession of Dhang the capital of Jaijakbhukti was Khajuraho but thereafter when this king's arm reached out "as far as Kalinjara", and especially when he took over the title of *Kalinjaradhipati*, this celebrated hill-fortress became the central city of the Chandel kingdom. To us the stand taken by Dr. Ray on this point seems to be correct. He says. "The expression 'as for as Kalanjara' shows that up to the date of the inscription the capital of the Candellas was situated not in that hill-fort, but in some other city. That this city was Khajraho is probably indicated by an epigraph of Dhanga which is dated 'in V.S. 1059 at Sri Kharjjuravahaka in the realm of Dhanga'. This is further supported by the *Kamil* of Ibn-ul-Athir, which refers to Dhanga's grandson as ruler of Kajuraha. It is also significant that the earliest inscriptions of the Candellas including those of Dhanga, came from Khajraho and not from Kalanjara or Mahoba. It should be noted however that as early as V.S. 1055 Dhanga is given the epithet *Kalanjaradhipati*. This may indicate that Kalanjara was regarded as a sort of second capital of the kingdom. But it is more probable that the epithet simply indicates the possession of one of the strongest hill-forts of India, which in an age ignorant of artillery, made his position almost impregnable. The strategic importance of this hill was well-known in India at this time, and the Kalacuris, the Gurjara-Pratiharas, the Rastrakutas and the Candellas tried in succession to retain their hold on its fortifications."[18]

Yet it is as the Lord of Kalinjar that Dhang finds a place in an important chapter of Indian history which was now being written in blood in the north-western regions of the country. According to an inscription discovered at Mahoba, "There appeared a blessing for the earth, called Dhanga, who caused destruction of his enemies, and who, by the strength of his arms equalled even the powerful Hamvira, who had proved a heavy burden for the earth."[19] The term 'Hamvira' or 'Hamir' in the above is generally accepted by scholars to be a derivative or, rather, a mutilated form of the Arabic word *Amir* which in the context could apply only to the Ghaznavids, Sabuktigin or Mahmud. As is well known, first Sabuktigin and then his son Mahmud invaded the territories of the Sahi rulers of Kabul who later sought, and got, the assistance of several kings of India. To quote from Ferishta's account: "In the year 399 H (1008 A.D.), Mahmud having collected his forces determined to invade Hindustan and punish Anandapala who had shown much insolence during the late invasion of Multan. Anandapala invited the aid of other Hindu kings who now considered the expulsion of the Mahomedans from India as a sacred duty. Accordingly, Rajas of Ujjain, Gwalior, Kalanjar, Kanauj, Delhi and Ajmer entered into a confederacy and collected an army greater than ever had marched against Sabuktagin..."[20] An earlier confederacy entered into against Sabuktigin in A.D. 991 had also included the raja of Kalinjar, who had assisted, if not in person, with men and material. Historians are certain that at least the earlier reference is definitely to Dhang, even if in the quotation from Ferishta

the raja of Kalinjar would stand for his son and successor, Gand. Commenting on this comparison between Dhang and the Amir, C.V. Vaidya says : "It may be noted that inscription-writers, though they may exaggerate, rarely descend to falsehood and...in the battle fought beyond the Indus by the combined Hindu forces against Sabuktagin, the result was victory for neither side and when Dhanga is described as equal to Amir, there is no falsehood in the declaration."[21] And, as Dr. Mitra puts it, "The Candellas, it must be admitted, had not to face the Turki onslaught till 1019 A.D., when Vidyadhara, a grandson of Dhanga was on the Candella throne. This justifies the claim of the *prasastikara* in comparing Dhanga with Hamvira as an equal in the Mahoba Record, whose reign was not marred by defeat at the hands of the Sultan."[22]

In addition to being a great ruler and a great conqueror, Dhang was an equally great patron of art and learning. At least two of the more important temples of Khajuraho, the Vishvanath and the Parshvanath, were built by him, and the Lakshman, commenced by Yashovarman, was probably completed by him. This indicates the broad outlook and the spirit of religious tolerance of the Chandel kings in general and of Dhang in particular. Himself a Shaivite, he found little to object to in the construction of temples of other sects, or in their dedication to other gods. Generally, he is also believed to have been a man of charitable disposition.

Such was Dhang, undoubtedly the greatest of the Chandel kings of Khajuraho. He died as full of years as of glory. When he "had ruled the whole earth over which he alone held sway, and had lived rather more than a hundred years, he abandoned the body in the waters of the Ganges and the Yamuna and entered into beatitude, closing the eyes, fixing his thoughts on Rudra and muttering holy prayers."[23]

Dhang's rule marked the zenith of the Chandel's rise. So strong and long had his arm been that for many years there was golden prosperity in the realm, and he and his successors were able to construct temlpe after glorious temple at Khajuraho. Already, however, another moon was rising from across the western frontiers, and it threatened the existence not only of these Moon-descended Rajputs of Jaijakbhukti, but of many another king and kingdom of Hindustan. After the invasions of Amir Sabuktigin, his son Mahmud had continued giving dangerous attention to India. He seemed to have evolved a plan and policy regarding the best way to loot the "wealth of Ind" and to spread the light of the Crescent over the land of the Infidel. Year after year he came to attack a new target, to plunder some fabulously rich Hindu fane, to punish the forces of this raja or that, and to take back to Ghazni loadfuls of wealth and renown. Located distantly, protected by the fame of Dhang, and enjoying no special reputation for hoarded wealth, the Chandel territory was spared for a longer period than were several other kingdoms. But there was no getting away from the threat that loomed large on the western skyline. It was wise, therefore, for the kings of Kalinjar to contribute towards the defence which the Sahi rulers put up against the Ghaznavid attacks. We have seen already that historians are not agreed as to the identity of the *Kalinjaradhipati* figuring in the list of kings who entered into a confederacy on the occasion of Mahmud's attack in A.D. 1008. One or two scholars seem certain it was Dhang and they stretch his rule up to this date. However, the consensus of opinion

favours Dhang's son Gand, recorded by the Muslim chroniclers wrongly under the name Nand, as the ruler who was associated with assisting Anandpal. Coupled with the evidence of the Khajuraho inscription of A.D. 1002 recording the death of Dhang, this would place Gand on the throne around A.D. 1000. And just as the scholars disagree regarding Gand's accession, there is a difference of opinion about the end of his rule. There is hardly any reliable information about him. One view is that his reign probably lasted till A.D. 1018. This is based mainly on the evidence of an inscription of the Kachchapghat Vikramsinh dated V.S. 1145 (A.D. 1088) which indicates that his great-grandfather Arjun, an ally or feudatory to Vidyadhardev killed Rajyapal of Kanauj who had in A.D. 1018 committed, for the Rajput, the unpardonable crime of surrendering to Mahmud. Other historians make Gand's rule stretch on till after Mahmud's two attacks on the Chandels, one in A.D. 1019 and the other in A.D. 1022-3. This is so because the Muslim chroniclers mention him in their accounts, though his name appears wrongly as Nand. In his celebrated article on the Chandels Sir Vincent Smith observes : "In the course of the 12th expedition in Jan. 1019, Rajyapala submitted and promised an indemnity of one million dirhems and 30 elephants. For this submission Rajyapala was killed by Ganda's son in May 1019. Mahmud invaded again and an ally of Ganda whose identity is obscured by the imperfections of the Persian alphabet but who was almost certainly Trilochanapala, son of Rajyapala, opposed Mahmud's passage of the Jumna but failed. Mahmud crossed the river and captured and sacked the town of Basi and then marched southwards to chastise Ganda in his own territory. He collected a force in accordance with the usual Hindu custom comprising 36000 horses, 115000 foot and 640 elephants. The Sultan felt uneasy and reconnoitred the army from an eminence. In the night Ganda fled. The Sultan carefully attacked the deserted camp lest there might be a ruse and got immense booty. The cowardice and the immense plunder again induced the Sultan to invade his territory via Gwalior. In A.D. 1023 Mahmud invested Kalanjar. Ganda gave him 300 elephants and immense presents and accepted back Kalanjar and 15 forts from Mahmud. Notwithstanding the success gained so easily by Mahmud, the Chandel kingdom was not attacked by Mahomedans until 180 years had elapsed and Ganda's successors were left to manage their own affairs."[24]

Modern historians do not accept all that is stated above in which, in any case, Smith has followed, blindfold, Nizamuddin's account. They point out that Nand was but erroneous transcription for Bida which itself was a faulty rendering of Vidya when written in Arabic characters. Some others who allow that Mahmud's invasion of Kalinjar took place in Gand's time disagree about the details. For example, Vaidya says : "The course of event according to our view was this. In the 12th expedition against Kanauj (1019) Rajyapala did not submit but fled to Basi. In the 13th expedition Mahmud led an army against Rajyapala and Basi and conquering him in the battle of the Rahib accepted his submission on condition of payment of tribute (1021 Mar.). In May Rajyapala was attacked and killed by Nanda (*sic*) assisted by Gwalior which Mahmud learnt at Lahore in 1022 Mar. and he led an expedition in 1022 Dec., against Gwalior and Kalanjar and exacted submission from both in 1023 Jan. In this

view Ganda does not appear to be craven-hearted as he is made to appear."[25]

The upshot of all this is that Gand's reign is variously placed as a short one between A.D. 1008 and 1017 on one extreme, and, on the other, as a fairly long one falling between A.D. 999 and 1025. Nothing is final in the matter of dates for this whole period, but it appears safe to accept that Gand ruled between A.D. 1002 and 1018. His reign was one of peace and prosperity and as a "ruler of the earth in the four quarters, expert in annihilating enemies, whose massive arms were terrible through the itching of pride" etc., he was able to maintain the Chandel prestige and power and kingdom which his illustrious father had built up. What is more, he was able to add to the artistic treasures of Khajuraho; and the Jagadamba temple, dedicated originally to Vishnu, and the Chitrgupt temple, dedicated to Surya, are attributed to him.

Gand was followed on the Chandel throne by his son Vidyadhar. Muslim chroniclers agree in their estimate of him as the most powerful ruler of Northern India at that time. He was a great king indeed. But, while Yashovarman and Dhang had displayed their valour in conquest and invasion, Vidyadhar was called upon to prove his strength and bravery in defence of the country against Ghaznavid attacks. These incursions had continued unabated under the able and powerful leadership of Mahmud, and just about the time of Vidyadhar's succession, the Amir had conquered Kanauj. As indicated in Smith's account given above, the weak Pratihar ruler, Rajyapal, had fled the field of battle and left Kanauj to the invader.

For this sin of surrender, the Kachchapghat Arjun had put him to death. Since the liege lord of this Arjun was the Chandel king, whose personal prestige stood high and who was regarded as the natural leader in Central India, Mahmud decided to punish Vidyadhar. It appears that, though he had assembled an immense force for the fight, Vidyadhar retreated under cover of night without a struggle. The records of the chroniclers give different versions of this event. According to one, Mahmud, too, had quailed at the sight of Vidyadhar's army and had decided to bargain for a friendly alliance. But Vidyadhar withdrew before this could be done, so that when Mahmud sent his envoys in the morning, they reported that the enemy was not to be found ! So much for the gamble called war ! Victory lay, technically, with Mahmud; but he did not choose to pursue the enemy and turned back to Ghazni.

In A.D. 1023 he came back, this time determined to reduce Kalinjar. Already, on the way, he had received homage from the governor of the impregnable fort of Gwalior, which he had beseiged but had not succeeded in storming. Now he came for Kalinjar, which fort, in the words of Nizamuddin, "was unparalleled in the whole of Hindustan for strength." According to the same scribe, "Nanda (Vidyadhar) presented three hundred elephants and sued for peace. He also sent a few Hindi verses in praise of the Sultan which were shown to learned men of the country and court-poets who bestowed high praise upon them ; the Sultan was pleased and sending some presents bestowed upon Nanda fifteen fortresses."[26] Mahmud thereafter turned back from the Chandel territory. "He was prudent enough", Vaidya remarks, "not to waste his power upon the reduction of such fortresses as Kalanjar and Gwalior, and contented himself with accepting their submission, and their non-interference with the king of

Kanauj paying him a tribute."[27]

Peace reigned once again and, possibly as a mark of relief and thanksgiving, Vidyadhar built that perfect gem of a temple and one of the masterpieces of Indian art, the splendid Kandariya Mahadev. As one scholar puts it, "It stands to reason that Vidyadhara, who was the most powerful and prosperous Chandella potentate, should have continued the brilliant building traditions of his predecessors, and the authorship of the Kandariya-Mahadeva temple, the largest and grandest temple of Khajuraho, may plausibly be attributed to him. Colour is lent to this suggestion by the fact that Vidyadhara is referred to in inscriptions as a great devotee of Siva and by the find of a short epigraph on a *mandapa-pilaster* of the Kandariya temple, mentioning a king called Virimda, which may have been a pet name of Vidyadhara."[28]

After the death of "Bida who was the greatest of the rulers of India in territory and had the largest armies, and whose territory was named Khajuraho...(and)...who had the unique distinction of being the only Indian ruler who effectively checked the triumphal career of Sultan Mahmud...(and)...who had gathered the flowers of the fame of his enemies,"[29] his son Vijaipal succeeded to the Chandel throne. Far from extending the kingdom, Vijaipal probably lost part of the Chandel territory to the Kalchuris who were now growing in power. Yet, by and large, he was able to maintain the nucleus intact and to provide the conditions of peace and security necessary for continuing the construction of more temples. Not that, strictly speaking, such conditions were essential for artistic activity. As Havell points out, "Fighting was the business of the Kshatriya caste alone, and when there was no vital national interest at stake, the wars which were the outcome of dynastic jealousies were only gladiatorial contests on a large scale in which none but the combatants and their relatives were deeply interested. The other three castes, Brahmans, Vaishyas, and Sudras went on with their respective occupations as philosophers, traders, and husbandmen, and looked for protection from the winners in the game whoever they might be. The description given by Megasthenes of men ploughing and digging the soil in perfect security, while close at hand armies in battle array were fighting desperately, may seem highly coloured, but it gives an insight into social conditions which prevailed in India under the caste system for many centuries."[30]

And so, if men could plough and dig the soil in perfect security while battles were fought close at hand, surely the *sthapati* could go on with his temple-building and sculpting while these *Maharajadhirajs* fought each other; especially so when every petty raja who busied himself in robbing and killing his neighbour invoked the blessing of God upon his undertakings by providing sumptuous temples in his capital. This state of affairs was, however, coming to an end. With the Muslim invasions and subsequent conquests, "vital national interests" came to be at stake and the fear of the iconoclast Mahmud and his followers put a stop to temple-building. Politically the power of the Chandels was on the decline. This had been brought about by the Muslim invasions as well as by the growing and determined attacks of the Kalchuris. Understandably enough, the importance of the place went on decreasing because, for reasons of strategy and security, the later Chandels kept increasingly to the hill forts of Mahoba, Ajaigarh and Kalinjar. This does not mean that artistic activity at Khajuraho ceased straightaway. As

Krishna Deva points out, "the artistic momentum of Khajuraho was not lost abruptly, for temples continued to be built here till the twelfth century. The Kandariya-Mahadeva temple was followed by a succession of smaller but almost equally artistic ones, such as the Vamaña, Adinatha, Javari and Chaturbhuja. The Saiva temple of Duladeo was erected during the first half of the twelfth century, and the construction of yet another large Saiva temple is recorded in a Khajuraho Museum inscription, which is paleographically assignable to the close of the same century."[31] Vijaipal probably got one or two of these put up, and the Vaman temple might be ascribed to him and dated as towards the close of his reign which is placed around A.D. 1051. There are no records of the period of Vijaipal's rule but a plate of his son and successor Devvarman is dated V.S. 1107 (A.D. 1051). In the absence of any other satisfactory evidence and relying upon this scholars conclude that Vijaipal's reign must have ended before that year.

Smith, however, fixes the succession of Devvarman around A.D. 1040. In two of his own records, those of A.D. 1051 and 1052, Devvarman claims to be the son and successor of Vijaipal and also uses for himself the epithet of *Kalinjaradhipati*. Yet in several other records of the dynasty his name is omitted. There is no indication of any dynastic quarrels, but Devvarman's rule was a dark and disgraceful period in which the Kalchuris inflicted on the Chandels much loss of prestige and territory. Devvarman has little to his credit. That he still paraded the title of *Kalinjaradhipati* indicates that he somehow managed to keep his hold on the fort of Kalinjar. Notwithstanding the typical court panegyric about him that "by the fire of his prowess he has devoured the whole circle of the regions, and become the spiritual guide to initiate into widowhood the wives of the enemies slain by him on the field of battle,"[32] there is little doubt that in his time the Chandel fortune suffered in power and status. His reign ended c. A.D. 1060.

Devvarman had no issue and Kirtivarman, his brother, ascended the throne, and "recreated the Chandel power like the Creator". This obviously means that there was a serious eclipse of the same in the previous reign. The Kalchuri Lakshmi Karn had indeed been styled in Bilhana's *Vikramankadeva-Charita* as "*Kalah Kalanjara-giripater-yah*" (death to the lords of the Kalanjar Hill). However, the same Karn was to suffer defeat at the hands of Kirtivarman's forces. That there was a recrudescence of Chandel glory is borne out by both literary and epigraphic evidence. The phrase quoted above is from Krishna Misra's play *Prabodh-Chandrodaya*. The inscriptions are far more eloquent. One reads : "In that race there was a ruler over the earth whose fame is sung by the *vidyadharas*, who was a pitcher-born (i.e., *Agastya*), in swallowing that ocean, Karna, and the lord of creatures in creating anew the kingdom, the illustrious Kirtivarman."[33]

Another inscription from Mahoba is still more eloquent: "Just as Purusottama having produced the nectar by churning with the mountain (Mandara) the rolling milk-ocean, whose high waves swallowed many mountains, obtained the Goddess of Lakshmi, together with the elephants (of the eight regions), he (Kirtivarman) acquired fame by crushing with his strong arms the haughty Laksmi-Karna, whose army had destroyed many princes, obtained splendour in this world..."[34]

Kirtivarman had a long reign of about forty years. He was a great patron of

the arts; the well-known play *Prabodha-Chandrodaya* was composed in his reign and performed before him. Of the extant temples at Khajuraho, Adinath, Javari and, possibly, the Chaturbhuj belong to the period of his rule which ended around A.D. 1100. He is believed to have been a Shaivite in his religious inclinations but he is more than once described in the inscriptions as Purushottam (Vishnu). In any case, he was true to Chandel traditions and extended his patronage to all sects including the Jains, some of whom, we learn, held high positions under him and perhaps built the Adinath temple.

After the passing away of Kirtivarman, there was yet another comparative eclipse of the Chandels. In fact, the conflict for supremacy in Northern and Central India among the Chandels and the other contestants like the Kalchuris was now in full swing, and a dynasty came on top or went down according to the personal valour and virtues of its ruling representative. For the next century or two, the story is one of survival and revival: "Henceforward the history of the Chandellas is a record of wars with their neighbours, the result of which often depended upon the personality of the combatant on both sides."[35]

Kirtivarman's successor was his son Sallakshanvarman, also inscribed, in the coins struck by him, as Hallaksanvarman. He seems to have enjoyed but a short reign. Although there are no records dating from his own time, records of the later Chandels describe him as a "leader of those versed in the sacred lore, a kinsman of the virtuous, a store of arts, and an abode of good conduct, and a tree of paradise to all suppliants for support". Again, in the typical language of the bards, he "always kept the enemies awake by the weight of his prowess", and "taking away the riches of his enemies and bestowing them on all his people of good family, he far removed the sad poverty". There are references to his anti-corruption devices, and perhaps he was just able to maintain the *status quo* in respect of the Chandel kingdom. There are, however, no spectacular achievements either in his own reign or that of his son, Jaivarman, who succeeded him probably in A.D. 1115 and was certainly ruling in the year A.D. 1117 as an inscription of Dhang's time was "re-written in clear letters by Jayavarmmadeva-nrpati" in A.D. 1117. He is described as a "dwelling place of generosity, truth, policy and heroism, whose majesty, like the rising sun, deprived other princes of their lustre." But his reign had little lustre and, possibly, he was defeated by the Gaharwar ruler Gouvind Chandr who conquered a part of the Chandel territory in A.D. 1120. Then, "being wearied of government", he "abdicated the throne in favour of his successor," and "proceeded to wash away his sins in the divine river."

This successor was an uncle named Prithvivarman. There is little worth mentioning in his short reign of about ten years. Some conventional descriptions of his conduct and achievements are available and these tell us that he "hated the ill-behaved, delighted the worthy people, spent money on good causes, protected all beings and secured propriety of conduct", etc. Actually, such were the conditions around the Chandels that it was work enough to keep things going. In addition to the Kalchuris who were already there to nibble at the Chandel kingdom, aggressive powers like the Parmars and the Chalukyas were threatening its security. It is to the credit, therefore, of Prithvivarman that in such hard times he was able to keep his kingdom intact and to pass it

on without damage to his son and successor, Madanvarman.

Madanvarman's reign is a period of revival for the Chandel reputation. Coming to the throne in about A.D. 1130, he discarded, from the very start, the passive policy of peace which his immediate predecessors had been following. Vigorously reorganising the Chandel forces, he set out to re-establish their lost prestige among neighbouring powers like the Kalchuris, the Gaharwars, the Chalukyas and the Parmars. There were no conquests as such, but it appears that the military strength of this Chandel ruler was duly acknowledged and even feared. Indeed, one inscription goes beyond that and one of its verses reads : "Before whose name even ever quickly flees the Chedi king, vanquished in fierce fight, and through the dread of whom the king of Kasi always passes his time in friendly behaviour ; by whom moreover the ruler of Malava, full of arrogance was quickly exterminated while other monarchs paying homage to him have enjoyed supreme comfort."[36]

There are other inscriptions which refer to more expeditions and perhaps Madanvarman was able to recover some of the Chandel territory lost by his weak predecessors. According to one inscription, he is supposed to have defeated even the Gurjar king. It is stated that Madanvarman's kingdom extended up to the "Jumna in the north, the Betwa in the south-west, Rewa in the east and the Nerbuda in the south." That is to say, he ruled over the Central Indian triangle which included the four strongholds of the Chandels, viz., Kalinjar, Mahoba, Ajaigarh and Khajuraho. This last received once again some royal attention in the form of a temple or two which were added to the existing monuments. The Duladev temple is probably a relic of his reign which ended around A.D. 1163, the date of the latest of the records of his time. The earliest of these is dated A.D. 1129, which gives him thirty-four years of successful rule.

Madanvarman's son Yashovarman II who succeeded him had a very brief reign, probably of only two years. An inscription of the time of his son and successor, Parmardidev, has this flowery description : "As the Moon, the crest jewel of Mahesvara arose from the ocean, so was born from him (Madanvarman) Yashovarman, who was an ornament of great rulers causing joy to the people, whose fame spreading in three worlds with the loveliness of jasmine and the moon, made the hair of men appear white and thus caused the unprecedented notion, that people before they had attained old age had, alas, turned grey."[37] It appears that this promising life was cut short by untimely death, and Parmardidev, the celebrated Parmal of history and legend, grandson of Madanvarman, occupied the Chandel throne. Last of the greater Chandel rulers, he was still a child when he was crowned, and an inscription of one of his successors refers to him thus: "A leader even in his youth, who struck down the opposing heroes, and to whom the fortune of universal sovereignty quickly came, like an enamoured damsel, choosing him of her own free will."[38] He ruled for a long period of nearly thirty-five years, for the earliest record attributed to his reign is dated V.S. 1223 (A.D. 1165-6) and the latest V.S. 1258 (A.D. 1201-2). Many were the vicissitudes of fortune which he saw during this long reign of his, and although legend and fact are so interwoven that it is difficult to assess his worth accurately, there is no questioning his right to an honoured niche in the history of those times.

For the first few years of his reign was peace, the peace which usually presages a storm. The storm came in the shape of a conflict with Prithviraj Chauhan, and it came with a whirl and violence that brought much disgrace and destruction in its wake. The how and why of the Chandel-Chauhan hostility is a matter on which bardic tales have more light to throw than history. According to the generally accepted version, Prithviraj Chauhan was returning to Delhi after marrying the daughter of Padamsen when he was attacked by some Turkish soldiers. Although they beat back the enemy, Prithviraj's army suffered some casualties and, losing their way, arrived together with their wounded at Mahoba, the Chandel capital, and encamped in the royal garden. The keeper of the garden protested against this and was punished for his persistent pains in the matter. Learning of this, Parmardidev sent some of his soldiers to the scene and a battle took place in which the Chandel force sustained serious loss. The Chandel king was now really furious and ordered Udal, one of his great generals, to attack the Chauhans. Much against his will Udal did what he was told but without much success. At this stage, however, Prithviraj moved away to Delhi where he continued to nurse what was a legitimate grievance against the Chandel ruler.

The attack on Prithviraj and his wounded soldiers had been instigated by Parmardidev's brother-in-law, the Pratihar Mahil . This Mahil was more an enemy than a friend of the Chandels, though he maintained an appearance of being a relative and an ally. Alha and his brother Udal, chiefs of the Banaphar clan, and two of the finest flowers of Rajput chivalry, sensed that the air of Mahoba was too foul for them to stay on in. They left the place as well as the Chandel court to take up residence and service under Jaichand of Kanauj. Mahil was quick to convey this most welcome information to Prithviraj and invited him to attack the Chandels, which Prithviraj did soon after. Bereft of the bravery and ability of the great Banaphar brothers, Parmardidev was much discomfitted. He sued for truce and sent for Alha and Udal. Reluctant at first to oblige the ingrate Chandel ruler, the brothers were persuaded by their mother in the name of *swamidharm*—duty to their lord—to go and fight for Mahoba. Fierce was the battle which raged after their arrival, and in this the two brothers played such an heroic part that their exploits have become a part and parcel of the Rajput annals and are sung to this day. Victory however lay with Prithviraj who sacked the city of Mahoba. Parmardidev is said to have retreated to Kalinjar before the battle which claimed many lives including that of Udal. A general of the Chauhan army then advanced on Kalinjar. He stormed and plundered the fort and brought back the Chandel ruler as a prisoner for presentation to his king. Prithviraj made Pajjun Rai, one of his generals, governor of Mahoba and returned to his capital, Delhi.

Bardic accounts have it that Parmardidev put an end to his own life from a sense of shame and degradation. This appears to be nothing but fiction for several inscriptions provide altogether different evidence. These indicate that he lived for nearly twenty years after the war with the Chauhans. In addition to the epigraphic evidence, there are the accounts of Muslim historians about the Islamic invasion of Kalinjar, which had hardly got over the sack by the Chauhans when this other and worse enemy gave it a look-up. The attack on the Kalinjar Fort took place in A.D. 1202 and was led by

Qutbuddin who was accompanied by Iltutmish. Parmardidev put up a stiff resistance, but this availed not, and he agreed to surrender and to pay a tribute. According to one version, he was assassinated for surrendering by his minister, Aj Deo, who reorganised a resistance. Another account given in the contemporaneous *Taj-ul-Ma'asir* provides several details. "In 599 H. or A.D. 1202 Kutubuddin accompanied by Altamash marched against Kalanjar. The accursed Parmar fled into the fort but after a desperate resistance submitted and accepted the same terms as had been imposed upon his ancestor by Mahmud. He, however, died and his Mehta Ajadeo was not disposed to surrender so easily and gave much trouble. He too was compelled to capitulate in consequence of a severe drought which dried up all the reservoirs of water in the fort. The fort of Kalanjar, celebrated throughout the world, was taken and the temples there were converted into mosques. Fifty thousand men were carried into slavery. Twenty elephants and countless arms were among the spoils. The reins of victory were then directed against Mahoba. The government of the country was conferred upon Hasan Arnal."[39]

The rule of Parmardidev was over, and with that the sun of the Chandels set for ever. The glow of the evening lasted a little longer but this hardly counted. In any case, the locale of the story had been getting farther and farther from Khajuraho. Mahoba had replaced Khajuraho as the political capital, and Kalinjar was regarded as more important than the city of temples with which our story is concerned. Just as well, too, for this saved Khajuraho and its precious fanes. The city continued to be the religious capital of the Chandels and received the favour of the rulers' attention even during the darkest days. True, no new or great temples seem to have been added by these later rulers but, as one scholar points out, "the testimony of Ibn Battuta reveals that the Khajuraho temples continued to shine in their glory till 1335."[40]

Of the rulers who followed Parmardidev, it is not necessary to talk at any length ; not only because as a power they had ceased to count but also because they made no material contribution to the story of Khajuraho. With Parmardidev, the Chandels had already become as of Mahoba and so they were to remain, at least in name, until the sixteenth century, when they are last mentioned in history. Considering the repeated fate of Mahoba and of Kalinjar, Ajaigarh was made the capital of Jaijakbhukti. The invasion and plunder by Qutbuddin, had shaken the very foundations of the Chandel kingdom. Complete extinction was not yet, but the wheel of fortune had taken the turn and there was no stopping its remorseless motion. For all its occasional flash and splendour, the light of the Chandels was no longer that of a glorious moon, but merely one of a candle and, that too, of a rapidly gutting one.

Parmardidev's successor Trailokyavarman is reputed to have recovered Kalinjar and his right to use the traditional Chandel title of *Kalinjaradhipati*. But the attention of the Muslims was soon focussed, yet once again, on this historic fort. The Muslim general Malik Nusratuddin Taishi led an army from Gwalior. The Chandel raja seemed to have avoided a struggle and the invaders plundered the city and took away rich booty. It appears, however, that Kalinjar continued to be in the hands of the Chandels, though Ajaigarh was their capital now.

Trailokyavarman ruled till after A.D. 1241 at which date there is a record of his reign. He was succeeded by Virvarman. This king, too had a long rule, of about forty years. Some verses in the Ajaigarh records describe him as one "who delighted the damsels of heaven by sending them, as lovers, the hostile heroes whom he cut down in the field of battle." And he is compared with "Vishnu riding on Garuda" and with "Siva roaming about on his bull, extirpating elements of wickedness on the earth." For all that, Chandel power was now rapidly declining and there is little record of the doings and dominions of Virvarman's successor, Bhojvarman, who probably came to the throne in A.D. 1288.[41] Perhaps both Ajaigarh and Kalinjar were still in the possession of the Chandels, and Khajuraho still their religious capital. In any case, Bhojvarman had but a short reign and Hammirvarman, who was probably a younger brother, succeeded. Available records of his reign indicate that he "not only held the ancestral dominion of the Chandellas including Mahoba region in the Hammirpur district and Ajayagadh, but also portions of Damoh and Jabalpur districts of the Central Provinces on either side of the Bhanrer range of the Vindhyas."[42] He ruled till A.D. 1308 or 1309 ; a record of the latter date proclaims Alauddin as the reigning king. Hammirvarman is generally accepted as the last known Chandel ruler, although some scholars mention one more successor, Virvarman II. In his account of the dynasty, Dr. D.C. Ganguli describes the end of the Chandels thus: "In A.D. 1309 Ala-ud-din Khilji wrested Damoh district from Hammirvarman or his successor. The next known king of Bundelkhand is Viravarman II who is known to have been ruling in A.D. 1315. Nothing is known of the successors of Viravarman II."[43] This is not strictly correct as Princess Durgavati, who was married to Raja Dalpat Shah of Garh Mandal in about A.D. 1545, was the daughter of the Chandel Kirat Rai, the raja of Kalinjar, who was killed when Sher Shah besieged that fort in A.D. 1545. This Durgavati is the same who "as regent for her son, Bir-Narayan, earned undying fame as the defender of his inheritance against the Muslim ruler of Malwa and against Akbar, though she perished in the Mughal's unprovoked attack."[44]

Historians usually leave off at this stage, not because all trace of the Chandels is really lost but because the dynasty ceases to be a ruling dynasty. Starting as a modest clan, it had built itself up as a house of some power and distinction. Their achievements in peace and their exploits in war merited notice and the Muse of History was impressed. Their period of splendour over, naturally they counted less and less and by degrees faded out. From Khajuraho they had moved on to their forts at Kalinjar and Ajaigarh, and then to Mahoba. From there they migrated, almost as a tribe, and branched off into various portions and to various places. Whether the cause was conquest—it is claimed by some scholars that Kanauj was taken over by them—or "the mere desire to obtain relief from an overcrowded home", even the few remaining rays of what was once a dazzling sun were scattered by the wind of time or lost under clouds of obscurity. The prophecy in the legend had come true; for had not the Moon-god cautioned Hemvati that the surname 'Varman' should never be discarded ? Parmardidev had not called himself Varman. Was then the double curse of his defeat, first by the Chauhans and later by the Muslims which together caused irreparable

damage to the dynasty's position and power, a result of disregarding the divine warning ? The successors, as we know, attempted a restoration of their earlier prestige and power. They even tried, if one may say so, the old spell of the Varman suffix. Apparently, for a while, the dynasty glows a little, but not enough to deserve any serious notice or sustained study. Smith's summing-up, therefore, constitutes the general position *vis-a-vis* the Chandels :

"The history of the Chandel dynasty as one of the powers of Northern India ends in 1203 A.D. with the death of Parmal and the capture of Kalanjar and Mahoba by the Muhammadan invaders. Trailokyavarman succeeded his father Parmal as a local chieftain, holding the eastern part of the ancestral kingdom, and in due course was succeeded by Viravarman and Bhojavarman. But no man can take interest in these purely local chiefs, and it is not worth while to discuss their scanty records in detail. Kirat Rai, who was Raja of Kalanjar in 1545 A.D., when Sher Shah laid siege to the fortress and besieger and besieged both perished, presumably was a Chandel. The last glimpse of the old ruling house is afforded by the romantic history of the princess Durgavati, daughter of the Chandel Raja of Mahoba, who married the Gond Raja Dalpat Sa of Mandla, and was killed fighting the Muhammadans under Asaf Khan in 1564. The Chandel clan dispersed after Parmal's defeat and death."[45]

In the context of our story of Khajuraho, the fortunes of this dispersed clan, are of little interest to us. Nevertheless a word should be put in to show that, in point of fact, the Chandel Thakurs have not been as defunct as the historians generally make them out to be. Apart from the local autochthonous Chandels who reside at Khajuraho, where Chandel glory stays personified in the "finest group of Hindu temples in Northern India", other branches of the clan have caused their record to be kept. From F.N. Wright we learn that the clan managed to hold on till the Mutiny, "their final ruin being accomplished by the disloyalty of their chieftain in 1857, and his imprisonment and subsequent death in a stranger's house."[46] His source of information is two family histories *(vanshavalis)*, one in Hindi and the other in Persian, the Persian one, belonging to the now extinct branch of Sheorajpur, being the more reliable "for a trustworthy description of the manner in which the Chandels came to establish themselves so far from their original home."[47] The account contained in the Persian manuscript was compiled by order of the last raja, Sati Prasad, in A.D. 1841, the main object of the compilation being an elaborate statement of the rights due to and the wrongs suffered by the Sheorajpur raja. As in other descriptions of the family, here also the legendary references to their divine origin are duly made: "The Chandels trace their origin through Chandra, the moon, up to Brahma, the great creative principle, including to their pedigree historic names such as Jijat and Pur. From Brahma to Sati Prasad, the last acknowledged raja, 118 generations are numbered."[48] Then, after describing the Hemvati myth the writer continues: "The fruit of this intrigue was Chandra Varman (called in the Persian MS. Chandra Puras, or Chandra Deo); and the date of his birth is given as Katik Bedi 204. From him to the well-known Parmal Deo whose fort, Kalinjar, was taken by Kutub-ud-din, in A.D. 1202 (Sambat 1258), there are, according to the Persian MS., 49 generations ; but the Hindi MS. reckons only 23.

The chronology of the latter, however, is glaringly incorrect...The Persian MS. probably errs in excess of names...It is clear, however, that no correct date can be assigned to any tribe in the long pedigree till the invasion of the Muhammadans."[49] Gathering his information from this "genuine antique" source, the writer goes on: "I divide the history of the Chandels into the following dynasties: (1) The Chande Chandawal; (2) the Chanderi—founded by Damkoh (Persian MS.), Bir Varma (Hindi MS.); (3) the Mahoba—founded by Madan Varma (Persian MS.), Man Varma (Hindi MS.); (4) the Kanauj—founded by Sabhajit; (5) the Sheorajpur, founded by Sheoraj Singh. Of course of these five dynasties, those preceding the Mahoba line are prehistoric. Instead of the 18 rajas of Mahoba given in Elliot's Glossary, the Persian MS. gives but 8, and the Hindi MS. but 14 (from Man Varma to Parmal Dev after whom the suffix Dev was invariably used)."[50]

The Chandels of Sheorajpur are mentioned in Elliot's Glossary and a reference is made to their "having been induced to leave Mahoba after a defeat of their chief, Birmaditya, by Prithiraj."[51] Elliot's description takes no account of the Kanauj branch of the dynasty, nor do historians, generally. But the manuscripts from which F.N. Wright constructs his paper make Sheoraj Deo descend from Dham Deo Chandel, of Kanauj, and it is this Sheoraj who founded Sheorajpur. The Persian MS. gives this account: "Sheoraj Deo founded Sheorajpur and called it after his own name, so that from Kumaon to Karra (Manikpur) the whole country of Kanauj was in his possession. Since the rule of the Muhammadans had been established now for some time, all the rajas and great men of the country attended the emperor's court, and amongst them Sheoraj Dev, regarding whom it was ordered that leaving Kanauj (where he was probably too strong) he was to reside in Tappa Radhan and Bihat, in the Parganah of Bithur, where is 'Sita Rasoi'. Sheoraj accordingly, obeying the emperor's order, left the fort of Kanauj, and first building a fort in Radhan lived there; and afterwards founding Sheorajpur, he established his rule there. While he lived in Kanauj he had soldiers, horse and foot, numerous as the waves of the sea, so that to enumerate them is impossible. They say that when the raja went for a short time to Karra, horsemen carried to him the betel leaf for him daily in his home, before the hour of midday meal." The Hindi MS. simply says: "In 1383 sambat, Sheoraj Deo came to Sheorajpur, and, destroying the fort of Radhan, founded Sheorojpur." The fort at Radhan was certainly far too masive to have served as headquarters for so brief a time as would appear from the Persian MS. It probably dates from before the Chandel incursion.

The author sums up: "I have shown above the principal branches of the original Chandel stock; of these, the Pachor branch is extinct, and the Sakrej branch practically so. The rana still grasps at some remnant of clan-authority, and his attendance at weddings is sought after to give the ceremony *eclat*. The other branches still flourish, the representative of Onha being the picture of a Rajput squire. The last titled occupant of the Sheorajpur *gaddi*, accused of disloyalty, was stripped of all his landed property—mutilated as its value was by the conferment of sub-proprietary rights on the Mukaddams at the last settlement—and thrown into jail; and after the expiration of [illegible] sentence he died dependent on the charity of a Brahman landowner, to whom all

the *sanadas* were left."[52]

The point of all this is that the Chandel Thakurs did not, overnight, cease to be ; they ceased to count. Viewed from that angle, and all these vestiges notwithstanding, the 500 year-old dynasty of Chandr Varman Nannuk ended with Virvarman II, and as one writer puts it "the glories of the Chandellas became a part of ancient legend."[53] A part of this legend, and a most glorious part, may be seen traced in stone at Khajuraho where, in spite of the ravages of time, enough remains to proclaim the artistic reputation and to immortalize the name of the dynasty !

# 4

# Before the Crescent

*From the lands where the elephants are, to the forts of Merou and Balghar,*
*Our steel we have brought and our star to shine on the ruins of Rum.*
*We have marched from the Indus to Spain, and by God we will go there again;*
*We have stood on the shore of the plain where the Waters of Destiny boom.*

THE WAR SONG OF THE SARACENS: FLECKER

ONE thousand years ago ! To roll back the pages of history that far, to reconstruct the India of those days, to recreate a picture of life and society in the age of the Chandels, is a very difficult task. Our minds are generally so deeply coloured and conditioned by our environment that it is hard to imagine the world of a hundred, or even fifty, years ago. How much harder then is it to refabricate, complete in all its detail, a world which existed a millennium earlier ! One would require a powerful imagination, a sharp intellect and a precise knowledge of diverse fields and subjects like history, sociology, religion and economics. Nevertheless it is necessary that an attempt be made to visualize the kind of people the Chandels and their subjects were, for then alone can we understand their work. For correct evaluation and understanding of what they have bequeathed to us, we must know the social conditions, the religious beliefs, the ethical values, the artistic ideals, as well as the institutions and traditions which obtained in their times. Between the building of those wonderful temples at Khajuraho and today, so much, so much indeed, has happened, such volumes of water have run down the stream of history, that without such a perspective our appraisal of these structures is likely to be inadequate, and our view bound to be warped and faulty. We must understand the ethics and the ideals, the thought-content and the motive-power of the Indian way of life before the Muslim conquest. This is not easy. The two main currents of beliefs and values which have since been woven into the texture of the Indian mind have radically effaced what subsisted then. It is, therefore, difficult to conceive that in those far-off days the iconoclast Muslim who was to destroy, in the

name of service to his religion, much that was of piety and worth and beauty to the Hindu, must have descended upon Hindu India like a denizen of another world. In the words of Al-Biruni, the scholar-historian of Mahmud's times, "The Hindus entirely differ from us in every respect...they totally differ from us in religion, as we believe in nothing in which they believe, and *vice versa*...in all manners and usages they differ from us to such a degree as to frighten their children with us, with our dress, and our ways and customs and as to declare us to be the devil's breed, and our doings as the very opposite of all that is good and proper."[1] There was little common ground between men of such opposing faiths and ways. And considering that the heroes of Islam had come not as friends but as foes, bent upon plunder and ruin and desecration, the Hindus could feel nothing but fierce enmity towards the Mohammedan. To quote, once again, from the shrewd and candid record of Al-Biruni : "All their fanaticism is directed against those who do not belong to them—against all foreigners. They call them *milechchha* i.e. impure, and forbid having any connection with them, be it by intermarriage or any other kind of relationship, or by sitting, eating and drinking with them, because thereby, they think, they would be polluted. They consider as impure anything which touches the fire and the water of a foreigner...They are not allowed to receive anybody who does not belong to them even if he wished it, or was inclined to their religion. This, too, renders any connection with them quite impossible, and constitutes the widest gulf between us and them."[2] The threat to their kingdoms and security and the insult to their gods and religion were hardly calculated to help bridge such a gulf. In fact, as the same historian remarks, "the repugnance of the Hindus against foreigners increased more and more when the Muslims began to make their inroads into their country. Mahmud utterly ruined the prosperity of the country, and...the Hindus became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions...Their scattered remains cherish, of course, the most inveterate aversion towards all Muslims."[3]

That gives some idea of the situation in the first quarter of the eleventh century. For the next two hundred years this (inveterate aversion) was to continue, and the bloodiest battles between the worshippers of the idols and their breakers lay ahead. After defeating Prithviraj at the end of the twelfth century, the Muslims stayed on on the Indian soil ; and although the process was to take several centuries, a time came when a near-fusion obtained between their conflicting ideologies. For people living in the India of Akbar, it would not have been easy to imagine the full force and meaning of Al-Biruni's words. But another storm of dust was gathering which was to distort the picture further. The European nations had started casting their covetous glances on the rich and fabulous East. As the Mughal power declined, the standard-bearers of Christianity and the so-called Western civilization gained a footing which was to develop into an occupation. Coming as merchants, the British became the masters of India and, because of their rule, not only the face but possibly the very soul of the country underwent a sea-change. As we can see, in one respect the fact that the English, and not the French, emerged victorious from the conflict for supremacy in this country has a bearing on our subject. Alike in regard to their Christianity and their European culture, as a people the French might not have proved to be such prudes as the British were. Among other things,

India's latest conquerors bestowed upon this nation the morals and values which are associated with "Victorianism", so that the British in India, by and large, misjudged the Hindu institutions and misunderstood the point and purpose of Hindu art and morality. The Victorian, who regarded the naked legs of a piece of furniture as obscene, was not likely to approve of the matings of the male and female sculpted on temple-walls. And, as master, he not only condemned the Hindu art himself, he nearly succeeded in inculcating his bias into the Indian mind, so that the work which the Muslim began was, in a sense, completed by the Christian, by the English.

Ostensibly, the British preserved the monuments of the Hindu and respected his sentiments, but the insular morality and peculiar prudery of India's erstwhile rulers and the lofty contempt of the Christian missionary for the superstitious beliefs of Hindu India, so subtly affected the mind of the Hindu that they all but shattered his faith in his own religion and his respect for his own art and culture. Luckily, there was a powerful revival, which attempted an unbiased examination and a truer appreciation of the old Hindu values. But hardly had this re-discovery of India started, hardly had the outside world begun to realise that like each race the Indians had "contributed something essential to the world's civilization", when a wholly new element forced its way into the situation. The powerful impact of science on the life and world of man brought about a revolutionary transformation in our thoughts and surroundings, in our ways and views. Consequently, in these days of the worship of the new god, the Machine, it is difficult to imagine the unscientific, religion-dominated world of those centuries during which Khajuraho's temples were raised. In any case, the available data are scanty and not very reliable. A studio semblance which a gullible cinema audience might regard as authentic is a different thing; but from the scholar's point of view even the most elaborate effort will yield only the vaguest sketch. Nevertheless, it is worth our while to try and peep into that old forgotten wonderland.

The political situation of those times emerges as one of many kingdoms spread all over the country. In Northern India, especially, there were, in the wake of Hun invasion and the break-up of Harsh's empire, several contenders for supremacy, who would assert themselves as the overlords and masters of Kanauj, then the seat and symbol of power in this region. As is well known, these new entrants in Indian history belonged to what are termed the Rajput dynasties. These Rajputs traced their descent from lofty, nay, divine origin, but most historians are now agreed that they were but Hinduised foreigners or tribal folk. In the words of Smith, "Probably it would be safe to affirm that all the most distinguished clan-castes of Rajputana or Rajasthan are descended mainly from foreigners, the 'Scythians' of Tod. The upper ranks of the invading hordes of Hunas, Gurjaras, Maitrakas, and the rest became Rajput clans, while the lower developed into Hindu castes of less honorable social status, such as Gujars, Ahirs, Jats, and others.

"Such clan-castes of foreign descent are the proud and chivalrous Sisodias or Guhilots of Mewar, the Parihars (Pratiharas), the Chauhans (Chahamanas) the Pawars (Pramaras), and the Solankis, otherwise called Chaulukyas or Chalukyas.

"The Rashtrakutas of the Deccan ; the Rathors of Rajputana, whose name is only a vernacular form of the same designation ; the Chandels and the Bundelas of

Bundelkhand, are examples of ennobled indigenous peoples. The Chandels evidently originated from among the Gonds, who again were closely associated with the Bhars."[4]

We have already seen in an earlier chapter that this whole period of Indian history, which is sometimes called the Rajput period, was one of chaos and disorder, of conflict and division. Even when, for a time, a strong dynasty or raja held sway, there was internecine warfare with other dynasties and rulers. Of course, howsoever similar their religion and uniform their culture, there was among these kings and their subjects no sense of unity, no sentiment of nationalism in the political meaning of these terms. Objectively viewing the causes of the downfall of Hindu India before the onslaught of the Muslims, the leading factor was this disunity. It is significant that during the two hundred years between the invasion of Sabuktigin and Mahmud and the final conquest of Northern India by Islam, the Hindus learnt no lesson and even at the time of Ghori's trials of strength with Prithiviraj, this flower of Hindu chivalry was engaged in conflict with the two other most powerful rulers of Northern India, the Gaharwar Jai Chand of Kanauj and the Chandel Parmardidev. It is an interesting 'if' of history what the course of events would have been had there been unity and a sense of larger loyalties amongst the leading Hindu dynasties of those times.

Within the realm, whether of one ruler or another, the scheme of things was more or less the same. The raja was the supreme head of civil administration and military power, although in practice the former might have been under the charge of a minister and the latter under the direction of a commander-in-chief. But at all times the pivot and centre of the realm was the raja. He symbolised the rise or fall of the dynasty ; his death in, or disappearance from, the battle-field meant defeat and surrender ; he was the source and fount of all prosperity and security for his people. Since social organisation was based on the caste system, the Brahmins stood for the brains of the community, and the Kshatris for the arms. That is why the minister was usually a Brahmin and the commander-in-chief invariably a Kshatri. The Vaish supplied the needs of the community and the Shudras comprised the serving class. Buddhism had certainly affected this system and, during the centuries when this creed held sway over the land, there was perhaps, little rigidity about these divisions. But with the recession of that faith and the resurgence of Hinduism as the dominant religion, the old pattern had tended to reassert itself. Apart from the fact that "the organization of the castes...was a powerful factor in the survival of Hinduism", it is now conceded by many that, as a working formula, this mode was fairly serviceable ; and that it lasted such a long time is a proof of its practical utility. Of course, it had serious drawbacks. For example, the fighting was left to one section of the society, so that in a national emergency, whenever the security of the realm was threatened, only a portion of the available man-power was engaged in defence. All the same, there is no denying its merits. Requiring pursuit of one branch of knowledge, or practice of one activity, by generation after generation, it made for specialization and mastery almost to a point of perfection. The Brahmin was free to speculate and philosophise about the world, the artist to adorn and beautify it, and the craftsman to produce article upon article of quality and excellence. The elaborate theories and theses which form the golden heritage of Hindu religion and

philosophy, the glorious achievements which are India's pride in the field of art, would hardly have been possible without the caste system. The Chandel architecture and sculpture with which we are here concerned were no isolated phenomenon. Like all work of those times, these, too, were executed under the aegis of a system which combined the advantages of economic security with state patronage and hereditary skill. Guilds, whose members found their work as natural as breathing and who knew the canons and conventions of their calling as well as the material they handled, could always be relied upon to look after any assignment with competence—the same competence with which they expected their king to rule and defend the kingdom, and the priest to teach and guide the people in matters of religion and worship. The concept of kingship and the respect for the Brahmin had not changed since the times of the epics ; the words of the *Ramayan* still held true :

*"Where the land is kingless the cloud, lightning-wreathed*
*and loud-voiced, gives no rain to the earth.*
*Where the land is kingless the son does not honour his father,*
*nor the wife her husband.*
*Where the land is kingless men do not meet in assemblies,*
*nor make lovely gardens and temples.*
*Where the land is kingless the rich are unprotected,*
*and shepherds and peasants sleep with bolted doors.*
*A river without water, a forest without grass,*
*a herd of cattle without a herdsman, is the land without a king."*[5]

Indeed, Manu, the Law-giver, had assigned a divine status to the king, thus,

*"When the world was without a king*
*and dispersed in fear in all directions,*
*The Lord created a king*
*for the protection of all.*
*He made him of eternal particles*
*of Indra and the Wind,*
*Yama, the Sun and Fire,*
*Varuna, the Moon, and the Lord of Wealth.*
*And, because he has been formed*
*of fragments of all those gods,*
*the king surpasses*
*all other beings in splendour.*
*Even an infant king must not be despised,*
*as though a mere mortal,*
*for he is a great god*
*in human form."*[6]

That explains why it was necessary for the Chandels to link themselves with the Moon-god, and why, like the rest of the kings all the world over and throughout history, they were so quick to assume titles which equated them with one divinity or another. That they are no less than a Shiv or a Vishnu or an Indr is often

repeated in the legends these Chandels caused to be inscribed on metal and stone.

But while the law-books had conferred this stamp of semi-divinity upon the king, they had also enjoined upon him the onerous duties of affording physical protection to his subjects and of upholding the right order of society, the right way of life for all classes and the right worship of the gods. The king was bound to ensure the security of the kingdom and the prosperity of his people. And all this depended upon the favour of the deities who had to be propitiated, in due form, for their boons and their bounty which, when obtained, called forth the registration of gratitude through the building and dedication of temples, through deeds of charity, and through generous gifts to the Brahmins.

The Brahmins were considered the link between gods and men, even between the king and the deity. In the ritual of worship the priest was always the intermediary, always the mediator. He accepted the offering for the god; he carried out the rites; he knew the *mantrs;* he could divine the will of the deity and advise what course the king or the commoner should take to please the god. Acting as the conscience of the people, the Brahmin provided a useful channel of psychological relief for the average mind. Little was the burden upon one's soul after one had done what the clergy had ordained. There was nothing good or bad but what the priests declared to be so. If, therefore, it was decreed that there should be dancing girls attached to the temples of gods or loose loves carved on their walls, it was accepted as right. It is difficult for us to take these things lightly because we belong to an age in which faith is scoffed at. Even so, we might just manage to appreciate the situation a little better if we examine our own attitude whenever we seek any technical advice. The experts know best—how many of us are not content to take that line? The medieval man accepted the priest as the expert on matters of vice and virtue, of right and wrong in the field of religion, and indulged in no pointless criticism resulting possibly in calamity for himself.

And so, while the king and the priest, the Kshatri and the Brahmin, undertook to look after the overall situation *vis-a-vis* the outside world and the other world respectively, the common people lived lives which were as well regulated as any. India, the favoured land of the gods, was still a 'Wonder' and a 'Splendour'. There was gold in plenty, both real and metaphorical ; fed by ever-flowing rivers and basking in the warm light of a glorious sun , the fertile soil yielded golden harvests with little labour. People were prosperous and generally lived a life of ease and abundance. To be well off and wealthy, to enjoy life and all its delights, was good ; that was what religion decreed. *Arth* and *kam* were among the declared aims of a Hindu's life, and the *grihasth* was required, as part of his religious duty, to acquire material treasures and to taste freely of the pleasures of the senses. The complete scheme of life included these as essential stages in the path to detachment from the mundane and to renunciation of the worldly. The average Hindu has never had any qualms about amassing wealth or gratifying the senses provided that at the ordained time, when he should be ripe for the next phase, he could without reluctance or regret renounce both and move on. For, in the final analysis, all is illusion and has value only for the hour.

But to revert to the prosperous householder. He had enough and plenty to live

by and to give away in taxes and charity. In one way or the other, much of these latter got converted into the tangible temples dotting every part of the country. Hinduism had just emerged triumphant, and there appeared to be a veritable race between ruler and ruler, nay, even their subjects vied one with another, to put forth the largest number and the very best of edifices for their gods. Of these gods, too, there were so many that there was no end to dedications. That the Chandel realm should have had so many of these temples, speaks much for the disposition and prosperity of its kings and people. That Khajuraho alone should have sported over eighty of these is a tribute to the city.

What was a city of those days like? We have few records concerning Khajuraho, and, however flourishing and large it might have been, it certainly never attained to the size and splendour of a place like Kanauj, the Pratihar capital, with its 10,000 temples. Nor did any of Khajuraho's temples ever attain the bejewelled and gilded glory of a Somnath. Nevertheless, since cities were objects of affection and a source of pride for their inhabitants, and the temples were the focus of the religious sentiments of the people, there can be little doubt that in its general layout and spirit the one-time political and all-time religious capital of the Chandels could not have been very different from other cities of medieval India, nor could its temples have been less revered than those existing elsewhere. Perhaps the city was big and crowded, with streets which were "broad rivers of people", where the stall-keepers plied their brisk trade and the craftsmen worked busily in their shops, and through which "noble men drove in their chariots, their gold-sheathed swords flashing, wearing brightly-dyed garments and wreaths of flowers," while "from balconies and turrets the many jewels of perfumed women flashed in the sunlight."[7] And perhaps, as in other cities, the king's palace was as much a centre of attraction as the temple; and, built, appointed and adorned to specifications laid down in the *Shilp-shastrs*, contained a music hall, a theatre, a dancing hall, a picture gallery, a gymnasium, and other fixtures and appendages considered necessary for the king's indulgence in a life of pleasure and refinement. Perhaps the temple area was one seething townlet, a replica of the plan and layout of the ancient Indian city, providing for all the needs and requirements as much of the deities as of the worshippers, the priests and the dancers, of the permanent residents and the visitors. On the other hand, the city of Khajuraho might have been as modest as the village is, and the king's palace just such as would befit the chief of a clan, and no more; the king and his subjects might have been content to lavish all their care and their comparatively limited resources on their temples that these at least might endure. Not a trace remains of the palaces, not a vestige of the streets and mansions of the city; but these houses of gods have stood through centuries of rack and ruin to proclaim the wisdom of the Chandels who chose to build, instead of painted pavilions for personal pleasure, these embodiments of a perennial philosophy, combining in one rich vision the beauty of art, the truth of religion and the glory of human existence!

Art and religion and human existence! Are they such different entities, after all? For the minds and men of today, only rhetoric might thread them together. Not so for the men and minds of medieval India. Already, in the Classical Age, living had been

developed into a fine art and required excellence in many things. Every conceivable activity had been treated in texts prepared with such thoroughness of thought and attention to detail that even today they make amazing reading. On this matter, Shah writes in *The Splendour that was Ind* : "Tradition speaks of 72 arts or kalas for gentlemen claiming to have had a proper education; and 64 for ladies of a like degree. These included, besides the ordinary learning and training in the arts of self-defence and preservation, (e.g. swimming), the art of stealing, and of dalliance. *The Little Clay Cart* of Shudraka is an eloquent testimony to the Indian's love of reducing even the art of the thief to a system; and the numerous works on the *Kama-Shastra* provide a wonderful reading on professional coquetry and sex-attraction, as a deliberate exercise. Singing and playing musical instruments in all their infinite variety; dancing in ballet or merely to keep time; painting and modelling in clay and in stone—these were arts and graces, ranking in importance for a gentleman of the Maurya or the Gupta times, along with the art of horse-judging or chariot-driving, or wielding martial weapons of all sorts."[8] Given such an approach, it is hardly surprising that the life-pattern of every person, from a king to a courtesan, was clearly laid down. The ancient Indian erotics describe in elaborate detail the arts which sophisticated men and women had to be well-versed in. Of the sixty-four arts which, according to Vatsyayan, maiden had to learn, twenty-four required the use of skill and physical action. These included dancing, music, both vocal and instrumental ; painting and doll-making ; speaking gracefully and knowing the script of other provinces; distinguishing genuine gems from false ones ; and the arts of toilet, shampooing and hair-styling. Twenty of the arts were based on gaming and wagering; they show the range and scope of social amusements then fashionable. The remaining sixteen were arts of the bedroom which, together with many subsidiary arts, covered almost the entire gamut of the pursuit and pleasures of love. The author sums up the value of these arts thus : "A public woman versed in these sixty-four arts is called a *ganika* (courtesan) and is esteemed by the public. She is even honoured by kings and praised by leaders of fashion. She attracts them and is visited by them. Princesses and daughters of the nobility, versed in these arts, can hold the affections of their husbands even though the latter should have a thousand wives and mistresses. Even if an expert in these arts should lose her husband, she may make a comfortable living in strange places by virtue of these arts. A man well versed in these arts, if he has a good tongue and a nice and charming manner with the ladies, can without much delay gain the favour of unknown women. Fortune smiles on men and women in the study of these arts, the application of which should depend upon consideration of time and locality."[9]

There are equally elaborate instructions as to the education and conduct of the man about town. After giving the disposition of such a man's residence, Vatsyayan states: "The man about town should, on rising before sunrise, ease himself, cleanse his teeth with brushes fashioned out of twigs and water, should moderately perfume himself with the help of pastes, aromatic fumes and scented extracts, should tint his lips with a little wax and lac dye, should look at himself in the mirror and should take into his hand his box of prepared betels and spices that sweeten the breath. All these done, he

should set forth for the day's business. He should bathe everyday, get his limbs massaged with oil every alternate day, use soap every third day, shave his face every fourth day and his private parts (pubic hairs) every fifth day, and use depilatories every tenth day. He should always stay in a covered place to check perspiration (i.e., should avoid going out into the open sun which causes perspiration and unpleasant body odour). He should take his meals in the morning and in the afternoon or evening. After the morning meal he should train his talking or fighting birds, play indoor games with his friends and have a midday siesta. On rising from it, he should comb his hair and, having dressed well, should meet his friends either at a courtesan's place or at a gaming house or at a friend's in the company of a courtesan in order to discuss literature, drink wines, promenade in public gardens or have water sports. He should have songs and music in the evening. Then, after the drawing room has been decorated and well perfumed, he should sit on his bedstead with his friends and await the arrival of his mistress. And if she should be late in coming, he should either send a woman messenger for her or go himself. When she is come, he and his friends should entertain her with loving and agreeable conversation and should please her by paying her small attentions and gifts. Should the mistress have come out to the man of fashion on a foul evening, resulting in her clothes being disarranged or dusty, he should undertake to set her clothes and toilet right with his own hands without the help of his friends. Thus end the duties of the day."[10]

The amusements of the cultured citizen included his attending social gatherings, drinking parties, garden parties, religious festivals and community festivals. Royal recreations included military exercises, literary pursuits, elephant sports and Indian polo, combatants' duels, wrestlers' contests, fights of birds and beasts and pigeon-flights, hunting, hawking and angling and, of course, the more popular items like theatrical performances, recitals of song and music, or dancing pageants and processions. In so far as the art of the Chandels reflects the society of the times, several scenes show some aspects of this variegated theme. But a more important field on which light is thrown by the sculptural decorations of Khajuraho's temple is the dress and jewellery of the times. Just as well, for, as one writer puts it, "History expresses itself first and foremost by means of clothes. Any given event is instantly visualized by means of clothes. One does not think of virtues or crimes, monuments or achievements, on hearing the name of any particular hero or conqueror, philosopher or tyrant, but of his personal appearance, which is dependent on his garments, his hair-dressing, the fashions of his moment."[11] If the sculpture is a true indication, then it is apparent that the apparel of men and women was as simple as it was scanty. Bare to the waist, men and women covered the lower part of the body with the *dhoti* or the *saree*. Gods and goddesses, kings and commoners, all wore the same dress—the same that had grown so popular with the Buddhist artist : a drape of diaphanous silk or muslin revealing the limbs of the wearer. But, by and large, ornaments and jewellery serve as the covering, wherever that is needed, of the human body.

The ornaments show a rich variety: necklaces, earrings ; jewelled ornaments for the head and the parting of the hair, anklets, bangles, bracelets and armbands ; ropes of

pearls and precious stones ; golden zones and girdles decked with jewels. These and a host of other items, which were a credit to the jeweller's art, are in evidence all over the sculptured surface. Similarly, the entire ritual of *toilette* along with a whole range of cosmetics is displayed by the carven beauties of Khajuraho : there is collyrium for the eye, lac dye for the foot, vermilion for the parting in the hair, *tilak* for the forehead ; there is the painting of lips ; the dressing of the hair ; and very often one finds a damsel perfecting this or that in front of a mirror. The perfuming unguents included saffron, sandal, musk, camphor and aloes. Elaborate coiffures, male as well as female, show different hair-styles. Indeed, the description of the heroine's *toilette* which Rajshekhar gives in his play might be applied to any one of the women of Khajuraho : "Her limbs were anointed with saffron and her eyes with collyrium, her lovely locks well arranged, her hair was decorated with flowers, while her person was adorned with earrings, rows of bracelets, a ruby-encrusted girdle, and emerald anklets."[12] The men and gods are a little less profusely, but no less dazzlingly, adorned, so far as ornaments and personal *toilette* are concerned.

A point of interest in this context is that the female figures carved at Khajuraho would indicate that it was not customary to keep the breasts covered. While some authorities maintain that representations in art are but conventional, others are of the view that, until the Muslim conquest, Hindu women exposed their breasts in public without this being considered immodest. Basham sums up the position thus : "It is asserted that, like the Greeks and Romans, the Indian artist and sculptor followed a tradition of showing the female form in a state of semi-nakedness, when this had no counterpart in real life. The objection, however, is hardly valid. When portraying real life, rather than mythology or figure studies, the classical artist usually draped his women. In the early sculptures of Bharhut and Sanchi, on the other hand, there is scarcely a woman with covered breasts, even among the crowds in the very realistic reliefs of Indian city life. References to bodices in literature are numerous, and women with covered breasts do sometimes appear in painting and sculpture ; but in the Northern Plains, and the hillier parts of the Deccan, the weather is quite cool for several months of the year, and the use of bodices may have been due rather to climate than to modesty. In Malabar, where many old customs survived long, it was quite normal until comparatively recent times for women of the Nayyar caste to appear in public naked to the waist, and the same is true of the island of Bali, which adopted Hindu culture early in the Christian era. In some literary sources there are references to married women wearing veils, but there is no evidence that these were regularly more than head-coverings, or that they concealed the form of the wearer. It is only in late medieval literature that clear expressions of the need of physical, as distinct from mental, modesty are found. Women in ancient India were considerably restricted in their activities, and a high standard of modesty was demanded of those of the higher classes ; but it is clear that their ideas of propriety in dress were very different from those of their descendants."[13]

The fact that Khajuraho's temples sport many a bashful damsel, who is not the least self-conscious of her naked breasts, seems to bear out the above. Possibly, the

cult of the Mother-goddess had helped to keep the breasts immune from being associated with the erotic. Even now a healthy Indian mother might expose her breasts to feed her child without much concern for the onlookers. The tribal women have generally been bothered little over breast-modesty, and even their best supporters are now inclined to regard the Chandels, and many more of all the inhabitants of Bundelkhand of those days, as of aboriginal stock, at least, partly.

But nude to the waist or wholly, what are all these alluring women doing on the walls of Khajuraho's temples? While we shall examine this issue at greater length in a later chapter, let us take note of one feature of the social and religious set-up of those times which is linked with this matter : the institution of *devdasis*, or temple-girls. This institution of courtesans attached to Indian temples was no novel element of this age but could be traced to earlier times. Nevertheless, these *devdasis* constituted a distinct social and religious unit in the Chandel times. Reference has been made already to the attainments of the accomplished courtesan or public woman. The maidens, who were dedicated to the service of the gods, had to be versed in all the arts so that they might please and entertain the deity in his house upon the earth even as the *apsaras,* those heavenly daughters of pleasure, entertained the gods above. The custom was now centuries old and by this time these women were accepted as a part of the normal establishment of Indian temples. As one authority points out, "The number of these girls in the temples often reached high proportions. The temple of Somanatha at the time of its destruction by Sultan Mahmud is stated to have been served by three hundred and fifty dancing girls. According to Chau Ju-Kua, Gujarat contained 4,000 temples in which lived over 20,000 dancing girls whose function was to sing twice daily : while offering food to the deities and while presenting flowers. We have the valuable testimony of Al-Biruni to the effect that the kings maintained this institution for the benefit of their revenues in the teeth of the opposition of the Brahmana priests. But for the kings, he says, no Brahman or priest would allow in their temples women who sing, dance and play. The kings, however, make them a source of attraction to their subjects so that they may meet the expenditure of their armies out of the revenues derived therefrom."[14]

It is not possible within the scope of this chapter to give more than a mere glimpse of the people who lived in India before the Muslims disturbed the tenor of their lives. Yet let us add to this rapid survey of the social situation the account of one eye-witness whose testimony in this regard is most valuable . "The Hindus believe," says Al-Biruni, "that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no religion like theirs, no science like theirs. They are haughty, foolish, vain, self-conceited and stolid. They are by nature niggardly in communicating that which they know, and they take the greatest possible care to withhold it from men of another caste among their own people, still much more, of course, from any foreigner. According to their belief, there is no other country on earth but theirs, no other race of men but theirs, and no created beings besides them have any knowledge of science whatsoever." He attributes all these faults to the fact that the average Indians had grown insular, so that "if they travelled and mixed with other nations, they would soon change their mind,

for their ancestors were not as narrow-minded as is the present generation." But for all their vanity and foolishness, he concedes that "the manners and customs of the Hindus, like those of the Christians, are based on the principles of virtue and abstinence from wickedness, such as never to kill under any circumstance whatever, to bless your enemy, and pray for him. Nevertheless, in the case of Hinduism, as of Christianity, punishment became inevitable, since most people are ignorant and erring and they cannot be kept on to the straight path except by the sword and the whip."[15]

Mark that the historian is talking of the Hindus all the time, and not of the Buddhists or of the Jains. For the India that the Muslim had come to conquer was Hindu India, smug and superstitious or chivalrous and civilized, but Hindu all over. Buddhism had already disappeared from the land of its founder, due partly to the Guptas and, later, to the powerful revivals brought about by men like Shankarachary and Ramanuj. But in reasserting itself the faith of the Hindus had itself undergone a metamorphosis which had broadened its scope but coarsened its fibre. The Vedic religion had yielded to the Puranic with its numerous deities. To the discerning there was still but one God, the Supreme Being, whose manifestations and aspects all these other deities were. But, for the vulgar, the stone came to be the incarnation ; the symbol was worshiped as the Reality. Cults of these different deities had developed into full-fledged creeds, two of which, Vaishnavism and Shaivism had become the most prominent. The Supreme God was usually regarded under the three aspects of creation, preservation, and destruction, represented respectively by Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv. It appears that, having created the Universe once, Brahma was no longer of much use in terms of fear or favour to the populace, and he soon lost the race for supremacy against the other two members of the Trinity. Shiv and Vishnu both dominated the field, with Vaishnavism strong at one time or place and Shaivism at another.

The *Purans* and other religious literature of the country evidence a colossal amount of fascinating myth and legend pertaining to these two deities of the Hindu pantheon, and the priest had devised a complex symbolism and an elaborate ritual of worship for them and their satellites. There were sects within these sects, and modes of worship were developed which ranged between the gentlest and the most gruesome, between the chastest and the most lewd. At the time of the Chandels, both Shaivism and Vaishnavism were equally in the ascendant.

Some of the rulers of the dynasty, especially the earlier ones, worshipped Vishnu, but a larger number were of the Shaiv faith. This, however, amounted merely to a nominal differentiation, for, in practice, the Chandel rulers accepted both the gods with more or less equal zeal and devotion even as the average Hindu in the North does to this day. For that matter they gladly welcomed the building even of Jain fanes, one of the most beautiful of which exists in Khajuraho. This is not very surprising, for the two faiths, Hinduism and Jainism, have had little real antagonism and their communities have always lived together in peace. Again, it is well known that Hinduism has been affected in its spirit by Jainism, and, in turn, Jainism has assimilated much of the mythology and iconography of the Hindus. In the context of their existence at Khajuraho, the Jain temples exhibit their appreciation of the tolerance accorded to their

faith by sporting among their sculpture Hindu deities like Shiv and Parvati and Balram and Revati. Indeed, in Khajuraho, Jainism seems to have been regarded as but another sect of the Hindus. The Jain temple of Parshvanath is so like the Lakshman temple of Vishnu or the Kandariya Mahadev of Shiv, that, as Fergusson puts it, "it requires very great familiarity to distinguish them. It looks as if all had been built by one prince, and by some arrangement that neither sect should surpass or be jealous of the other."[16]

Since one of the features of all these temples is their erotic sculpture, associated in one explanation with the Tantric sect, a word may be said about this. We shall have occasion in a later chapter to deal with this matter in detail but two observations might be made here. Khajuraho is located in a region which had the fullest impact of Buddhism in all its phases. When, with the strange and unforeseen developments which took place in the Mahayan sect of this faith, many new patterns of worship and channels of thought were introduced, the people of this area could hardly have escaped their impress. Secondly, the Chandels were traditionally associated with the worship of a female deity Maniya Devi who, as Chand states, was appealed to by these Rajputs in time of danger. An image of a female with a sword in hand found among the remains of a small temple at Maniyagarh is regarded by some authorities as "a sort of compromise between the Brahmanical Parvati and the naked female worshipped to this day by some tribes of Gonds." The cult of the Mother-goddess, or of Shakti, was not new to the land and Tantric practices might have been a normal element of the religious set-up. And since all art was religious art, all religious features would naturally find their way into artistic representation, without question or query. The artists were not theologians out to argue and discuss religion or other abstractions. They were skilled artisans, expert in their line, assured of their place in society, wanted for much work including temple-building, image-making and sacred carving, and competent to do all that. Among other craftsmen, the *rupkar* and the *sutradhar*, either of whom became, as master, the *shilpi*, had a great time of it. Central India had a building tradition which was centuries old; and through the handling of quantities of beautiful and great work the builders and carvers had evolved techniques and developed skills which enabled them to keep up a standard of excellence in execution even when the far greater inspiration of an earlier age had ceased to obtain. It was fortunate that the Chandel rulers were such munificent patrons of the arts, that their realm, Jaijakbhukti, enjoyed a period of comparative peace and prosperity, that Khajuraho was not so easily accessible to the Muslim hordes as was Kanauj and that the artists employed by the Chandels proved to be so well-trained and lively. Surely, it was through the conjunction of all these auspicious factors that the remarkable group of Khajuraho's temples came into being.

Historians tell us that the temple and the palace constituted the two foci of the medieval city. Whether this applies to Khajuraho—or if it did, for how long—is a matter of conjecture. The rulers of Khajuraho took pride in calling themselves *Kalinjaradhipati*, and cities like Mahoba and Kalinjar were soon to be of greater political and military importance in the growing Chandel kingdom. Nevertheless, Khajuraho continued to enjoy the status of a religious centre where temple after exquisite temple was put up to the glory of ruler after Chandel ruler. And since in the age with which

we are concerned, impulsion for all activity, political or artistic, came from the king, the rulers of Khajuraho richly deserve the tribute paid by Krishna Deva in his study of the dynasty : " The Chandellas emerged during the early tenth century as a strong central Indian power with one of their capitals at Khajuraho. Under the patronage of the Chandella princes, who were great builders and connoisseurs of arts and letters, Jejakabhukti was blessed with prosperity and political stability and was swept between the tenth and twelfth centuries by a cultural upheaval manifesting itself in a substantial literary output and the flowering of an architectural movement of uncommon charm and vigour. The Chandella court was adorned by poets like Madhava, Rama, Nandana, Gadadhara and Jaganika and by the dramatist Krishnamisra, author of the *Prabodh-chandrodaya.* Among the princes Ganda and Paramardin were themselves poets of no mean merit, while Dhanga and Kirttivarman were liberal patrons of poets and writers. The Chandellas also decorated their realm with tanks, forts, palaces and temples, which were mainly concentrated in their strongholds of Mahoba (ancient Mahotsavanagara), Kalinjar (Kalanjara) and Ajayagarh (Jayapuradurga) and, to a lesser extent, in their towns of Dudhai, Chandpur, Madanpur and Deogarh in District Jhansi, of which the first three they themselves founded. But none of these places could compare in magnificence with the capital-town of Khajuraho (ancient Kharjjuravahaka), which was adorned by the Chandellas with numerous tanks and scores of lofty temples, each vying with the other in sculptural grace and architectural splendour."[17]

When Hiuen Tsang visited this part of India, he mentioned in his records the kingdom of Chi-chi-to whose capital was "about 15 *li* in circuit." Though not all scholars identify this capital with Khajuraho in the kingdom of Jijhoti, the Chinese traveller had not regarded the name of the place worth recording. In any case Khajuraho hardly enjoyed any importance before the rise of the Chandels in the tenth century. After they had come upon and gone off the stage of history, came Ibn Battuta who referred to the place as Kajarra where "there is a great pond, about a mile in length, near which are temples, containing idols which the Muslims have mutilated."[18] Luckily the Muslims had come rather late and Khajuraho escaped total destruction. It is true that of the eighty-five temples which tradition ascribes to the place, a mere twenty-five are now extant. But even these help immortalise the name of their builders as the builders have helped immortalise the name of Khajuraho.

# 5

# The Soaring Shikhar

*Om, I bow to the holy Vastupurusa of great strength and valour*
*Whose body rests under all dwellings, Son of Brahma,*
*Upholder of the entire Universe,*
*Whose head is placed to carry the burden of the earth,*
*Who makes all sites (receptacles of) his presence,*
*The towns and cities, temples (and palaces), houses, tanks and wells ..*

PAURANIKAVASTUSANTIPRAYOG

IN the language of the *shastrs* as well as in common parlance, the Hindu temple is verily the House of God, *devalaiy*, the deity's terrestrial dwelling place. Indeed, the site upon which the form of the fane rises is known as the *Vastupurush*, the thing upon which resides *Purush*, the Prime Person, "who alone is this entire world, both past and future," so that one might designate the temple not merely as a divine habitation but the very body of god. For the worshipper, the temple is literally "a diagram of the cosmos" and "a place for the meeting and marriage of heaven and earth." There, he may not only offer his homage to his particular god to whom the temple is dedicated, but also have the *darshan* of the other members of the pantheon who grace the walls within and without. Therefore, a visit to the temple is not just an act of piety; it is, veritably, a pilgrimage.

Several legends explain the origin of this association of the gods with the earth as their abode. The one given in the *Brihatsamhita* says : "Once there was some existing thing (sattva) not defined by name, unknown in its proper form it blocked heaven and earth ; seeing that, the Devas (gods) seized it of a sudden and laid it on the earth face downwards. In the same position as they were when they seized it, the Devas stayed on it where it lay. Brahma made it full of gods and called it Vastupurusa."

A variation of the tale is narrated in more elaborate detail in another text thus: "In former times in the war between the gods and the Asuras, the Asuras were

destroyed ; they were crushed by the gods with Puramdara at their head, through the greatness of the power of Vishnu. Their Guru, the son of Bhrgu, who was of an impetuous disposition, became highly incensed and sacrificed a goat with auspicious marks as an oblation in the fire. That goat became a goat-headed Asura through the sweat which fell into the fire as he was offering the oblation. It rose (from the fire) covering earth and sky with its body of horrifying dimensions and asked the great sage 'What shall I do?' The son of Bhrgu replied to it, as it loomed terrifically : 'Expel from heaven the gods whose minds are dull.' Thus spoken to, it rushed at the gods intimidating them with roars, and scorching, as it were, the three worlds with the flames that issued from its mouth. In fear, the gods with their troops expelled (from heaven) approached Sambhu, the all pervading and fearless one, who is decorated with ashes. They were completely routed by their defeat by the son of Bhrgu ; Siva, their protector, ordered the Fire which issued from his third eye in the shape of a spirit (bhuta) to save them. 'Thou should burn the cruel and over-grown goat-Asura after having crushed the son of Bhrgu'.

"Thus spoken to, the Fire chased the son of Bhrgu, without rest, and he fled pursued through the three worlds. He found no refuge but in Siva who is 'decorated with ashes'.

"Then by the power of Yoga he made his body small and for protection entered the body of Siva through the ear. When he reached the belly of Siva, he saw the whole universe rested there confidently, and took heart. The three-eyed god, in his divine sight, saw him take shelter and without surprise he said to the sage with a smile : 'Fear not, O Bhargava, I am pleased with thy diplomacy. Having stayed within me you are my son ; now come out at your pleasure. I have bestowed on you the great sovereignty and supremacy among the planets. In these three worlds, you shall ever regulate justice and injustice, rain and drought'...Saying so, the three-eyed (god) discharged him through the semen-passage. Thence he got the name Sukra (Semen). Then Sukra, knowing his own desire, bowed to the Lord and submitted. 'Contented am I ; favoured am I ; who is more fortunate than I? I have thus been graced with favour by the God of the gods'.

"To the Brahman Sukra, lying prostrate in salutation after saying so, the Lord, the all pervading, with the crescent moon upon his brow, being pleased, said, 'Ask another boon'. Sukra (now) also made the frightened goat-demon prostrate himself before Siva and ask for protection. To the fallen demon lying like a stick, dejected, with his face to the ground, he said pleased : 'I grant you protection, and also the boon which is desired by you, O goat'. Thus addressed by Sambhu the Asura said respectfully : 'May you pardon me the evil deeds perpetrated by me through ignorance so that I may through your favour dwell on earth with the concurrence of the gods. Grant me this boon. The gods, Brahma, and the rest should be worshipped while residing in me'. Hearing this, the carrier of the trident (Siva) said : 'As you have asked me for a residence (vastu—derived from the root 'vas', meaning to reside), as a boon, your name will be Vastupa (protector of vastu). So be it. Reside now on earth (Vasundhara) ; and the gods Satananda (Brahma), and the rest will be pleased to reside

in you ; henceforth, whosoever builds a divine or human residence, to dwell on this earth, should first worship you with flowers, incense, lights and special tribute (bali)... Prosperity comes to those who perform the worship of Vastu laid down by myself and who reside in those buildings and houses. May the temples (and palaces ; prasad) ; and the houses (bhavana) etc., which are built without performing the worship of Vastu, and all that is done there, be demon's work.' Thus the god (Siva) granted boons repeatedly to Sukra and to Vastupa, and engaged gods to reside in him ; and vanished thence. Through the boon of the Lord, the all pervading, the place thus oriented by the fall of the Asura, at Sukra's command, before Sambhu, became immediately the abode of the deities.

"In the same way even today, Vastu lies on the earth with the head towards the north-east and the face turned to the ground. Thus, as the desired boon was obtained by Vastospati from Siva, so his worship is desirable while building Vimanas of both gods and men."[1]

Splendid legends, splendid lies ! as Mark Twain remarks somewhere. Accepted *in toto*, none the less, by the faithful even today, so that for the devout the *devtas* do abide wherever the *asur* lies. That is why one has to be very careful regarding the selection of the site for the temple, and equally careful in measuring and marking it out, even as in propitiating the spirit or spirits living there already, in sanctifying the land, in laying the seed exactly where the *garbh* is located, in doing a hundred things before the work of construction proper begins. And, then, each stone or brick must be deified, as it were, before it is set in its place. In fact, the entire matter of putting up a temple is a complex ritual and the *shastric* instructions cover every step and detail from the foundation to the final where the *shikhar*, the spire, culminates. The *shikhar* is itself a rich symbol. Like the steeple of the church and the minaret of the mosque, it is a gesture of longing, an index of man's reaching out to the Absolute, his urge to merge with the Infinite. Since the *asur* of the legend usually symbolises a fall, a descent, the soaring spire of the temple would signify the upward flight of the human soul. Looked at in this way, the temple represents the Mount Mandar, the churning-stick, used by the gods in the act of obtaining nectar, the drink immortal, from the Cosmic Ocean. Or, it is Mount Meru, the link between earth and heaven, on the top of which is the world of gods. Sometimes the temple is equated with Mount Kailash, the abode of Shiv, where the ascetic-god sports with his great consort Parvati, the gracious, alias Durga, the terrible. But one or the other, and whether its entity is explained by much learned eloquence or its meaning and purpose confounded by equally learned ignorance, for the simple hearts of the people the temple is just *devalaiy*, residence of the god. There the worshipper will find at one place, in the space between the *garbhgrih*, where the idol of the chief deity stands, and the *jaidhwaj*, flag of victory, flying atop the *shikhar*, an entire universe. Built usually at a *tirth*, the temple itself constitutes a *tirth*, a place of pilgrimage. Standing upon the *Vastupurush*, the monument acquires holiness irrespective of its surroundings. The usual prerequisites of a *tirth*, "groves, rivers, mountains, springs, and towns with pleasure-gardens", where the gods love to play, cease to have significance.

The texts state that "installations should be made in forts; in auspicious cities, at the head of shop-lined streets;... in villages or hamlets of cowherds where there are no shops, the installations should be made outside in gardens ...Installations should be made at riversides, in forests, gardens, at the sides of ponds, on hill-tops, in beautiful valleys and particularly in caves. At these places, the denizens of heaven are present.' But the texts are known only to the scholar; the common man just knows that wherever the temple is and whether it be plain *lingam* or statue at the corner of a street, or one of those sprawling city-like structures of Southern India, there "the denizens of heaven" are. And since the temple is no local phenomenon of yesterday's making, but is the symbol and projection of the religious consciousness of a whole people, accumulated and built up during thousands of years, the thrill which the sight of the temple occasions is a religious experience as intense as it is peculiar to those who subscribe to the faith.

K.M. Munshi describes this emotion well : "When the worshipper spies the spire of the temple at a distance, he breathes a sigh of relief. The journey's end has come. As he passes through ancient trees, or looks at the river running by, or at the lake in front, the beauty of nature uplifts his soul and the sordid world is left behind, if not forgotten. As he comes nearer, he is overwhelmed by the massive front of the temple, and then by its high-springing spire. The shapes and figures of gods, men, animals and foliage on the temple walls spring before his eyes into vivid form, and the varied richness of the Creation is about him. Then, as he observes one figure after another and follows with interest the successive meaning of the Puranic episodes depicted on the walls, his sub-conscious mind embraces both the history and the hopes of his race. He recognises his favourite gods. His heart turns to them in thankfulness or expectation. He becomes one with them. As he enters the temple, he is overcome by the grandeur of the inner dome. His pilgrimage culminates in the *garbha-griha*, the inner shrine. Its coolness and fragrance so different from the worldly experience that is his, suppresses for a moment the vital movements of his body. Out of the surrounding darkness there rises before him an almost imperceptible outline of the deity as the flickering lights throw shifting shadows on it. He is overwhelmed by his own insignificance. He sees the deity. He finds the fulfilment of the aspirations which have so far remained inarticulate...He feels that he is in a higher world surcharged with divine power. When he bows before the deity, he feels himself in the presence of God."[2]

Of course, in the final analysis, the devotee comes there for this act of personal worship, of invoking with the aid of *mantrs* and *dhyan*, magic formulae and meditation, the deity, whose image has been set up there, that he, the humble devotee, might commune with the Lord, seek boons or surrender his being. In the arrangements of a few stones which mark its earliest beginnings as in its fully developed form of a complex of elegant structures and towering spires, the temple has ever been characterized by this invocation of the deity, by this union of the mortal and the divine. That is why even in the most elaborate and stupendous temple, the 'service' is in its essence a personal matter of tuning one's soul to one's god, at which the priest might assist, but no more. There certainly is no question of worship *en masse*,

even though the congregational singing of songs of devotion might create such an impression. Sylvan Levi adequately sums up the essentials in this context : "The Hindu temple, in spite of the considerable modifications it has received in the course of time, still expresses the individual character of Vedic rites. There is no collective service, and so no nave where the faithful can assemble for corporate prayer. The temple is the personal dwelling-place of the god, who lives there in human fashion, in a statue or symbol. The priest's function is to provide for the needs of the god's daily life : to wake him with music, bathe him, make offerings for his meals, and pleasure him in all sorts of ways, mainly by reciting litanies, hymns and psalms. The priest is also the indispensable intermediary between the god and his worshipper, the sacred and the profane. The worshipper brings his homage and offerings, and the priest renders them acceptable to the god. The spiritual centre of the temple is the Holy of Holies, where the god dwells in a specially sacred statue."[3]

It is important to understand these fundamentals of the spiritual significance of the temple even as it is useful to know the constructional and artistic traditions associated with it. Without rightly understanding either of these, it is not only not possible to appreciate to the full the flavour and excellence of the institution, but one might even wholly fail to sympathise with the artist's vision of beauty or the worshipper's feeling of beatitude. Such an inadequacy has often been pointed out as the root cause of the lack of correct appraisal of the Hindu arts generally. In the words of Havell, "Art is, in one sense, a universal language, but the finer inflections of it are so intimately associated with national life and thought that no one can pretend to understand any distinctly national phase of it who stands entirely aloof from its national environment."[4] If it is true that " in India all art, like all life, is given over to religion," that "Indian art is life, as interpreted by religion and philosophy," how much more difficult is it to appreciate the temple art of India without understanding her religion and philosophy! Sri Aurobindo puts the case in most eloquent terms : "The criticism of art is a vain and dead thing when it ignores the spirit, aim, essential motive from which a type of artistic creation starts and judges by the external details only in the light of a quite different spirit, aim and motive. Once we understand the essential things, enter into the characteristic way and spirit, are able to interpret the form and execution from that inner centre, we can then see how it looks in the light of other stand-points, in the light of the comparative mind. A comparative criticism has its use, but the essential understanding must precede it if it is to have any real value."

And in respect of temple architecture specifically: "Indian sacred architecture of whatever date, style or dedication goes back to something timelessly ancient and now outside India almost wholly lost, something which belongs to the past, and yet it goes forward too, though this the rationalistic mind will not easily admit, to something which will return upon us and is already beginning to return, something which belongs to the future. An Indian temple, to whatever godhead it may be built, is in its inmost reality an altar raised to the divine Self, a house of the cosmic spirit, an appeal and aspiration to the Infinite. As that and in the light of that setting and conception it must in the first place be understood, and everything else must be seen in that setting

and that light, and then only can there be any real understanding. No artistic eye however alert and sensible, and no aesthetic mind however full and sensitive can arrive at that understanding, if it is attached to a Hellenised conception of rational beauty or shuts itself up in a materialised or intellectual interpretation and fails to open itself to the great things here meant by a kindred close response to some touch of the cosmic consciousness, some revelation of the greater spiritual self, some suggestion of the Infinite. These things, the spiritual self, the cosmic spirit, the Infinite, are not rational, suprarational, eternal presences, but to the intellect only words, and visible, sensible, near only to an intuition and revelation in our inmost selves. An art which starts from them as a first conception can only give us what it has to give, their touch, their nearness, their self-disclosure, through some responding intuition and revelation in us, in our own soul, our own self. It is this which one must come to it to find and not demand from it the satisfaction of some quite other seeking or some very different turn of imagination and more limited superficial significance."[5]

Since the temple is all this, abode and body of god, house of the cosmic spirit, and altar to the Infinite, the canonical literature leaves nothing to guesswork. In a way this is true of every branch of knowledge and every sphere of activity, for the ancient Indians seem to have had a penchant for an elaborate yet precise treatment of any and every aspect of human existence. The temple is, therefore, but one of the items in the field of architecture which also covered, contrary to the common notion, a host of secular structures and an infinity of matters allied at times rather distantly to this art. For example, in the *Mansar*, which is India's most widely known work on architecture and sculpture, the term architecture "implies almost everything that is built or constructed according to a design and with an artistic finish", and "Architecture proper or house-building is preceded by an elaborate treatment of the village-scheme, town-planning and all the cognate subjects, such as laying out gardens, constructing market-places, commercial ports and harbours, making roads, bridges, gateways and triumphal arches, digging wells, tanks, trenches, drains, sewers and moats, building enclosure walls, embankments, dams, railings, landing places, flights of steps for hills and bathing ghats and ladders. All kinds of buildings in use at the time or likely to be required by the country, including religious temples, common dwellings, gorgeous edifices, pompous palaces and mansions, and military establishments, are treated in the minutest detail, alternative measures, and a large variety of options to suit all requirements. Articles of furniture are similarly treated and include bedsteads, couches, tables, chairs, wardrobes, baskets, cages, nests, mills, conveyances, lamps and lamp-posts for the street. Thrones and crowns for different ranks of kings and deities form a distinct branch. Personal ornaments and dresses and garments include various chains, ear-rings, armlets, anklets, foot-rings, waist-bands, jackets, headgear, and foot-wear. The preliminary subjects include consideration of ground conditions and atmospheric conditions, temperature, sunshine, site conditions, elevation and sloping of the ground, testing of soil and finding exact cardinal points for orientation of buildings and determining proper aspect and necessary prospect and privacy."[6] And yet fantastic as this list might seem, it was informed by a rational and practical approach. General architecture is, of

course, a comprehensive affair, and, in a sense, such an all-embracing view of this art would hold good anywhere and for any age. But all this is relevant even for sacred architecture, for the religious temples mentioned in the inventory. Considering that for the Indian temple-builder, architecture included sculpture which itself covered every detail and aspect of existence, considering that Ajanta and Ellora, temple-cities like the one on the hill of Satrunjaya, and the city-like temples of South India, are realities of Indian art, the fear is that some item of importance might have been left out, that there might be points and problems which these bright theoricians did not anticipate when they set down their clear and careful instructions regarding every step in the elaborate process. Authorities, however, affirm that "nothing that is seen on the temple is left unsaid in the verbal tradition."

And if the treatises on architecture left nothing to chance in respect of the verbal tradition, the builders were themselves so well selected and so excellently trained that there was little possibility of a sub-standard result. In one of these works, attributed to Raja Bhoj of Dhar it is stated : "He, who begins to work as an architect without knowing the science of architecture and proud with false knowledge must be put to death by the king as one who ruins the kingdom ; dead before his time, his ghost will wander on this wide earth. He, who though well versed in the traditional science is not skilled in the work will faint at the time of action like a timid man on the battle-field. He, who is expert only in his workmanship, but unable to understand the meaning of the traditional science, will like a blind man be misled by anyone."[7] Now these architects, *sthapatis*, and their fellow craftsmen like the sculptor or the painter, were required to work under the supervision of the *sthapak*, the architect-priest, whose instructions and direction were law for them. The *Shilpratna* lays down . "He who wishes to build villages, etc., or royal palaces, etc., tanks etc., or temples, should select a Guru and Silpin for this purpose. Let the Guru be a Brahmana of high born family, who has performed all the sixteen purificatory rites, who knows the essence of the sacred texts, the Vedas and Agamas, and who observes the rules of conduct according to his caste (varna) and stage of life (asrama), who has received initiation (diksa), is competent, exerts himself in his work (tapasvin) and is a believer (astika) in the sacred tradition. First a Sthapati is to be selected—one well versed in the Silpa-sastras and possessing all the qualifications of an Acarya, being selected by the patron, should perform the architectural rites. The temple or any other construction, begun by these two should be continued by them only and by no other. In case they be not available, the work should be done by either their sons or disciples who are competent in the work." And further, "The Sthapati should be fit to direct the construction and should be well-versed in all Sastras, the traditional sciences, perfect in body, righteous, kind, free from malice and jealousy, a Tantrik and well-born ; he should know mathematics and the Puranas, the ancient compendia of myths, etc., painting, and all the countries ; he should be joyous, truth speaking, with senses under control, concentrated in mind, free from greed, carelessness, disease and the seven vices, famous, having firm friends, and having crossed the ocean of the science of Vastu."[8] Similarly, a Tamil *shilp-*

*shastr* lays down : "The shilpin should understand the Atharva Veda, the thirty-two Shilpa Shastras, and the Vedic mantras (hymns) by which the deities are invoked. He should be one who wears a sacred thread, a necklace of holy beads and a ring of *Kusha* grass on his finger ; delighting in the worship of God, faithful to his wife, avoiding strange women, piously acquiring a knowledge of the various sciences, such a one is indeed a craftsman."[9] And if there is any doubt left as to the exacting standard for the selection of the worker, here is the oft-quoted text of Shukracharya which equates art with *yog* : "Let the imager establish images in temples by meditation on the deities who are the objects of his devotion. For the successful achievement of this yoga the lineaments of the image are described in books to be dwelt upon in detail. In no other way, not even by direct and immediate vision of an actual object, is it possible to be so absorbed in contemplation, as thus in the making of images." This stress on *dhyan*, on self-identification with the object, this conception of art as *yog* , is no idle fancy but an essential condition for realization and achievement. The mind must be converted into a mirror in which will appear the vision of one's work accomplished already, before the least physical effort has been made. Thus, they say, did Valmiki, the author of the *Ramayan*, create the book as a completed mental version before the act of writing began : "Seating himself with his face towards the East, and sipping water according to (ceremonial) rule, he set himself to yoga-contemplation of his theme. By virtue of his yoga-power he clearly saw before him Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, and Dasharatha together with his wives, in his kingdom laughing, talking, acting and moving as if in real life...by yoga-power that righteous one beheld all that had come to pass, and all that was to come to pass in the future, like a nelli fruit on the palm of his hand. And having truly seen all by virtue of his concentration, the generous sage began the setting forth of the history of Rama."[10] Not therefore as a mere craftsman, conscious or even proud of his skill, but as an instrument of the divine builder, Vishvakarma ; not as an artist but as a *yogi* or devotee undergoing an elaborate ritual of purification and concentration — that is how the architect or the sculptor must work. Mere knowledge, mere skill—these are not enough. " He who knows the traditional science and its meaning and masters the craft, is not as yet the perfect artist. For immediate intuition, a readiness of judgment in contingencies, and the ability to fuse them into the requirements of the whole, are the distinctions of a true Sthapati. It is then, that the builder himself, once his work is completed, is struck with wonder and exclaims : Oh how was it that I built it!"[11]

All this does not mean that the craftsman was not required to be perfectly skilled in respect of his work. That was taken for granted. The guilds were founded on a hereditary basis, and every worker was born, so to speak, to the manner and technique of his craft. Living and growing up amidst his father, uncles, brothers and cousins, who followed the same calling, he would learn to chip and chisel before he knew how to walk and talk. His apprenticeship was long and the training strenuous so that when, in due course, he himself became one of the workers, he possessed all the ability and knowledge which his art demanded. With his skill went the spirituality which the *shastrs* enjoined upon him to cultivate. To these were added a sense of divine

descent and dedication to a noble mission. The Indian craftsman always knew that, in the words of Carlyle, "a man cannot make a pair of shoes rightly unless he does it in a devout manner." And if this should be true of a pair of shoes, how much more necessary was it to have the devout manner in regard to the construction of temples! But this devoutness was fully backed by technical know-how and by long practice. It was because of all these, with skill playing its due role as well as spirituality, that he was able to build the temples of which others might say, "Oh! how was it that he built these ?"

In his book, *The Hindu View of Art*, Mulk Raj Anand rightly emphasises this point thus : "The high spirituality of the Indian artist...must not, however, lead the reader into neglecting what it has been the great contribution of Sir William Rothenstein to have made clear to the students of Indian art—the Indian artist's skill. Nowhere is it more true than in India that art is both content and form, conception and execution. If the Indian artists were essentially the bearers of a message, a prophecy, they were also essentially the skilful bearers of that message or prophecy. If it was the deep religiosity of their mental outlook that enabled them to conceive the Reality behind appearance, it was also their intimate knowledge of appearance which helped them to translate the Reality into form. That this fact was emphatically recognised is clear from the following remark which the Hindus (so fond of claiming Divine authority for everything) put in the mouth of Maha-deva (Siva) in his discourse with Parvati (Sakti) : All is fruitless, the repeating of *mantras* (prayers), and the telling of beads, austerities and devotion, unless one has gained the knowledge of the *Varnas* (colours)—the true significance of lettering, the lustre and the virtue of figures. Another Hindu text lays down that 'one who knows amiss his craft...after his death will fall into hell and suffer.' An artist may have the vision and not the technique, and then, according to the Hindus, he is as unfortunate as a skilled workman without a vision."[12]

And now, a word about the man at the other end of the process of creation, the *rasik*, the enjoyer of art, viewer or worshipper, as well as the original patron, the *yajman*, the sacrificer, for whom the craftsman worked. Just as the craftsman had to be a man of parts, had to be spiritually trained as well as technically skilled, so it was with the patron, the one who commissioned the work, as also the one who might enjoy it thousands of years afterwards. He, too, had to be worthy—devout as well as discerning, holy as well as whole ; or, else, it would be like unveiling the deity to the *nastik* and the *kupatr*, to the unbelieving and the unworthy. In India, art has never been for art's sake, nor for the artist's ; it has been for the patron, the *yajman*, for whom it is an act of sacrifice, of piety. Again, it is important to realize that the appreciation of art, the enjoyment of the creative effort, is possible "only by those who are competent thereto, (and) in identity." In this, imagination is a great help. As Dharmdatt points out, "those devoid of imagination, in the theatre, are but as the wood-work, the walls, and the stones." But imagination alone will not suffice. More is needed : feeling and faith, piety and reverence. In *The Dance of Shiva*, Coomaraswamy quotes a wealth of apt quotations supporting this stand, for both

critics and artists have, in all ages and climes, held more or less similar views in this matter. Shukracharya goes to the extent of maintaining that the defects of images are constantly destroyed by the power of the worshipper who has his heart always set on God. Perhaps the correct position is that of Croce when he says that "...pictures, poetry, and every work of art produce no effect save on souls prepared to receive them."[13] Not in the beloved only, but in the lover too ; not in the image alone but in the worshipper also, is a point of contact essential if the circuit is to be completed. Not only upon that which is inherent in the thing created, but also upon what the *rasik*, the "taster," whether of beauty, book or life, brings to bear upon its contemplation, will the total effect depend. Indeed, there is the theory that the *rasik* is all in all and the rest is illusion, nothing but a mirage, a projection merely of his vision, existing not apart from but as a part of himself. As Walt Whitman puts it :

> *"All architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it.*
> *Did you think it was in the white or grey stone? Or the lines of the arches and cornices?*
> *All music is what awakes in you when you are reminded of it by the instruments,*
> *It is not the violins and the cornets...nor the score of the baritone singer*
> *It is nearer and farther than they."*

Two significant points emerge from the foregoing : the metaphysical nature of Hindu art, and the relativity of the Absolute called Beauty. This relativity is related to the enjoyer, the *rasik*, no less than to the artist, the maker. Consequently, even if beauty does not lie wholly in the eyes of the beholder, he cannot be altogether freed of blame should he see evil in art or monstrous ugliness in the images. The metaphysical aspect on the other hand may rest itself on the Vedantic conclusion that all is Self ; or on the philosophy that art and religion are but two names for the same experience, and hence whatever the artist creates is religion and, therefore, holy ; or finally, on the plea that all things are redeemed by Beauty everlasting. The Hindu view of art as well as of religion provides space and scope for a multiplicity of expansions.

We do not know whether the builders of Khajuraho's temples were as holy and pious as the treatises on art require them to be or possessed the vision that the theories of art endowed them with. But there can be little doubt about their skill and virtuosity. Considering their work, it seems reasonable to accept the view that the craftsmen were taken over by the Chandels with that part of the Pratihar empire which fell to their lot. Countless fine temples of the North, including the ten thousand of Kanauj, disappeared in the wake of the Muslim invader. This is generally overlooked, and there is little which is extant to prove the excellence of the Pratihar architecture, so that the achievement of that dynasty in this field has not received its due recognition. The Chandel rulers themselves had been, for quite a long time, the vassals and intimate associates of the Pratihars and, as such, must have been familiar with the art and traditions and the artistic creations of their overlords. Furthermore, there was frequent movement of these princes on account of warfare within the entire area which

is commonly known as North India, so that they would have had many opportunities to study all those various regional styles and idioms which went into the perfecting of the typical Khajuraho pattern. It is amazing how judiciously and unerringly the Chandel craftsmen picked the best from each variety of the *Nagar* classification of temple, to which the monuments of Khajuraho belong, and how cunningly and effectively they fitted those diverse accents and elements into their own work.

Whether the chronology of these temples spreads over three centuries, as some scholars will have it, or is limited to the mere hundred years between A.D. 950 and A.D. 1050, the period will form just a brief interlude in the long stretch of Indian history. There have been other periods of brilliant achievement and of even shorter duration : for instance, that of the Mughals from Akbar to Shahjahan. But the fact that a comparatively insignificant dynasty like the Chandels should have done so well calls for applause ; and this is accorded ungrudgingly by a whole chorus of discerning critics as well as admiring laymen. Of the exceptionally fine tributes, that of Fergusson has been in part referred to earlier but will bear repetition : "The city of Khajuraho, the ancient capital of the Chandels...is now a deserted place, but has in and around it a group of some 30 temples which, so far as is at present known, are the most beautiful in form as well as the most elegant in detail of any of the temples now standing in India."[14] Percy Brown finds in this group of temples at Khajuraho, "one of the most refined and finished manifestation of Indian architecture in the Indo-Aryan style."[15] For Stella Kramrisch they represent a "moment of perfect utterance"[16] in the history of Indian temple architecture. Benjamin Rowland is of the opinion that in this extraordinary group of temples at Khajuraho, "the culmination of the Indo-Aryan genius in architecture was attained."[17] And in a beautiful book on Khajuraho, written jointly with Eliky Zannas, Jeannine Auboyer speaks of its architectural site as being "without question one of the most beautiful in India, with the intact temples retaining an allure so magnificent that one is overwhelmed by the immensity of such a phenomenon."[18] One could go on like that for pages because Khajuraho has received much praise, especially in recent years, and there are no discordant notes. All are agreed that forming, "perhaps the largest group of costly Hindu temples now to be found in northern India",[19] these monuments constitute a consistently beautiful cluster, and include some of India's most magnificent specimens of medieval architecture.

Since the general opinion about the temples of Khajuraho is that they are the perfection and culmination of a distinct style, and since these fanes are not an isolated event, but stand at the end of a long process of development, any study of these must trace, even if sketchily, the pre-Khajuraho part of the story of the Hindu temple and, particularly, that of the so-called Indo-Aryan or North-Indian classification. It is by no means a smooth story and there are many obscure patches like the dating of the earliest temples or the determining of the original impulses and influences behind the institution, which still await the scholar's searchlight. Nevertheless, the earnest labour of many historians, critics and archaeologists has already given it some shape and cogency, so that it is possible to reconstruct the broad outline and fit

in, here and there, a bright little detail or two. Moving, then, within the area of agreement, we find that the origin of the Hindu temple may be traced to the Vedic altar as well as to the prehistoric practice of marking the sites of relics with circles of stones or with mounds which were capped and covered with stones. Also, that, elaborations and modifications apart, the form and philosophy of the Hindu temple cannot be divorced wholly from, even if they are not intimately linked with, the impact of the Greek invasion and the influence of the Buddhist, especially Mahayan, art and ritual. Indeed, the fifth-century Gupta Temple No. 17 at Sanchi which is generally accepted as the earliest extant example of the Hindu temple points to all this. It enjoys the company of some of the most celebrated Buddhist (albeit not Mahayan) structures, yet its shape suggests the Grecian column-and-porch arrangement. Of course, scholars differ, as scholars will, as to the degree of these influences; but there is a broad acceptance of these points.

The case for the above view was stated very lucidly by Sir Norman Edgley in an address on *The Temples of India* given several years ago to the Royal Society of Bengal in Calcutta. Conceding that the non-Aryan followers of primitive cults might have erected shrines in connection with their modes and objects of worship, he opined that the prototype of the great palace-temple was probably introduced into India by the Greeks. "Available historical and archaeological evidence," he said, "seems to indicate that, when the Grecian invasions took place, temple worship formed no part of the religious system of India. The religion of the majority of the ruling classes in the northern part of the country was Vedic Brahminism. Their sages had developed an elaborate system of philosophy ; they expounded the doctrine of the transmigration of souls and advocated strict adherence to the rules of caste. The gods of these people represented powerful forces of nature, which might be propitiated by an elaborate sacrificial ritual known only to the Brahmins themselves. The Vedic sacrifices were not, however, of such a nature that they had to be performed in temples. On the contrary, they necessitated the erection of altars in the open air." As for the second aspect, that of the Buddhist influence, it is well-known that "the settlement of the Greeks in the Punjab coincided with certain revolutionary changes in the ritual and doctrines of the early Buddhists." This refers to the formation of the Mahayan system of theology "which regarded the Buddha as the centre of an enormous pantheon of Bodhisattvas and other divine beings through whose intervention in the affairs of man salvation might be achieved." The Buddha image was developed probably through contact with and in emulation of the western nations which "had honoured their deities for many centuries by providing for them earthly homes and temples and it replaced in the shrines, the earlier symbolic representations of the Founder, like the stupa, the umbrella or the throne." The result of these developments was that a powerful impetus was imparted to the faith which gained immensely in popularity and, as Sir Norman put it, "between the second and the seventh centuries A.D., it seemed within bounds of possibility that Buddhism might become the national religion of the country."[20] This it just failed to become because the shrewd and sharp-witted Brahmin sensed the situation, gave up his high and mighty pose of lofty disdain and, throwing intellectual subtleties and

cultural niceties overboard, set about matching the Buddhist myth and ritual with still more fanciful flights of theological thought, and with forms of worship which were at once more festive as well as more impressive. Absorbing wholesale the older cults of the aboriginal Indians and the people of Dravidian descent, the Hindu soon began to count his deities by the million, and combining judiciously all the good points and attractions of Buddhism and Jainism with a great deal which appealed to the tribal mind, Brahminism not only stemmed the tide but turned the tables completely, so that before long Buddhism vanished from the land of its origin. It was during the process of reorientation of the Vedic and the Vedantic into the Puranic and the popular that the institution of the temple was seriously taken over by Hinduism, and it wasted no time in first imitating, then experimenting with, and thereafter perfecting, both in external form and inner meaning, what it had started with. Adding grandeur and grace to its shape, ornament and decoration to the entire body of the temple, and beauty and significance to the ritual of worship, the Hindu achieved wonders in just a few centuries of temple-building. Considering that there is no trace of many of the temples of North India, it may be true that the institution of worship in temples is older than the earliest extant temples themselves. In fact, this is the view held by several scholars. O.C. Gangoly, for example, would have it that "the Brahminical form of worship has now been proved to have been in existence at the beginning of the Christian era...(although) no temples dedicated to the worship of Shiva or Vishnu appear to have survived before 400 A.D."[21] Yet, the most tangible example of the earliest form of the Hindu temple, the Gupta shrine at Sanchi, already referred to, "is very primitive in shape," indicating little progress over the rock-cut sanctuaries of the Buddhists. The point is that even if the dating of the first Hindu fanes is moved back by a few centuries, precious little seems to have been achieved in between. On the other hand, with the Gupta temple as the starting point, the pace grows fast and, within a couple of centuries, distinct shapes and categories like the *Dravir*, the *Nagar* and the *Vesar* are evolved. In four hundred years all the elements of development and decoration, all the characteristics of form and fashioning, are tried out. Consequently, the latter masters of a place like Khajuraho had only to select from the existing, to adapt and combine constituents which were already at hand, and to create out of these, as the builders of the Taj drew upon and created from the earlier achievements of Mughal architecture, a style all their own and yet steeped in tradition, a shape of beauty, at once singular as well as familiar.

It is evident from Temple 48 at Sanchi and the Jindal temple at Taxila that temple architecture was attempted before the Gupta period. None the less, it is in the Gupta period that we should look for the real beginnings of the Hindu temple. Also, it is during this period that all the characteristic features of the *Nagar* type-of which the Khajuraho temples are about the finest existing examples—were evolved. The earliest Gupta example is to be seen in Temple 17, near the great Stupa at Sanchi. This structure has a flat roof and consists of a cella and a porch in front supported by pillars. Two more examples of this type are to be found, one at Eran (Gwalior) and the other at Tigawa (Jubbulpore).

The so-called Parvati temple at Nachna and the Shiv temple at Bhumera, both in Madhya Pradesh, indicate that temple architecture had by then acquired a roofed cloister around the sanctum for circumambulation, a feature to be found in all Hindu temples. In the Lad Khan temple at Aihole in Bijapur District the roofed cloister is relieved by trellises. None of these temples has a steeple, *shikhar.* This first appears in the Dashavtar temple at Deogarh (Madhya Pradesh) and in the brick temple at Bhitargaon, near Kanpur. The most representative example of the Gupta temples is the Dashavtar temple. The shrine is approached by flights of steps on the four sides, and its steeple is pyramidal in elevation. Today the main attraction of this temple is its rich sculptural decoration.

Differing in design Gupta temples share nevertheless, some common features. According to Cunningham, there are seven of these, as follows: (1) flat roofs without steeples of any kind; (2) prolongation of the head of the doorway beyond the jambs; (3) statues of the personified Ganges and Jumna guarding the entrance; (4) pillars with a massive square capital, surmounted by two lions back to back, often with a tree between them; (5) bosses over the capitals, and peculiar friezes; (6) continuation of the architrave of the portico as a moulding round the building; and (7) deviation of the plan from the cardinal points.

We have observed above that after a few centuries of development the Hindu temple produced three distinct divisions. The *shilpshastrs* label these the *Dravir,* the *Nagar* and the *Vesar.* The term *Dravir* or Dravidian would indicate that the classification was based on geographical division and, superficially, this seems to be right. The three main regions of the country have always been well marked out: the Northern, from the Himalays to the Vindhyas; the Central, from the Vindhyas to the river Krishna; and the Dravidian, from the Krishna downwards. But the descriptions given in the *shastrs* are too vague and general to provide adequate clues. Also, in the earlier stages of development, examples of one type or the other are to be found crossing their regional confines. Not until the Middle Ages is it safe to allow that the Dravidian style is the Southern style, and the *Nagar* the North-Indian. By that time, the *Vesar,* which was from the outset a cross and a hybrid, had been abandoned and only these two major categories remained in the field. To some critics the nomenclature Dravidian suggested, through association of ideas, another line of explaining the terms, at least the two more important ones. Linking the Dravidian not with the regional but with the racial, the corresponding term Indo-Aryan was coined, and this still rules as the most fashionable of the three names usually given to this particular style, viz. *Nagar,* North Indian or Indo-Aryan. In practice all three are used interchangeably, and only the very scholarly or the very choosy care to stick to the one which they have somehow managed to explain to themselves as the correct one.

Yet another way of classification and elucidation of the names for the styles is by reference to the shapes of the temples. In fact, the *shastrs* describe the temples along those lines. From that point of view, the *Nagar* is regarded as rectangular in form or square with angles projected; the *Vesar* as circular; and the Dravidian as octagonal. A further feature of recognition is the design of the roof and spire. The *Vesar* has a

barrel roof, having no spire, while two have *shikhars* which differ in detail and design. Thus the *Nagar* has a curvilinear *shikhar*, and, in addition, a *kalash* (jar) as well as a ribbed *amalak* (emblic-myrobalan) to distinguish it from the Dravidian. All this makes for a delightful confusion which is often resolved in modern studies of the subject by going not from the texts to the examples but, rather, by turning from the extant edificies to the explanation of the canons.

Proceeding in that manner from the actual to the theoritical, we find that in general the *Nagar* temple may be distinguished by two characteristics: the ground plan and the elevation, the cruciform spread and the curvilinear spire. These two features are to be found in every temple of this class, although there are endless modifications and elaborations thereof which vary from area to area and from people to people. In accordance with these variations, scholars find it convenient to divide the temples of this style into several groups like the Orissan, Central Indian, those of Rajputana and Gujarat, and so on. Of these groups the most important, in respect of numbers, historical significance, and artistic excellence, is the group of temples in Orissa, at Bhubaneshwar, Konark, Puri and other places of ancient Kalinga. And, without doubt, the next in rank to these Orissan temples, comes the Chandel group of temples at Khajuraho.

It has been stated above that the two distinctive features of the *Nagar*, the North-Indian or the Indo-Aryan, temple are its ground-plan and the tower, the former being cruciform and the latter curvilinear. The plan is known in texts as *chaturas-rayatasara*, which may be interpreted as "square with projecting angles." Temples with towers and spires as against flat roofs had been evolved by the sixth century A.D. Thus the Huchchimalligudi temple at Aihole has a cella and a *shikhar* which distinguish it from the earlier flat-roofed temples at Sanchi, Tigawa, Nachna, and even at Aihole itself. But the temple with the square plan and the curvilinear spire may be seen in examples like the Dashavatar temple at Deogarh and the brick temple at Bhitargaon. These are among the earliest as well as the most representative specimens of this style at that stage. Aihole and Pattadakal also furnish examples of the North-Indian style which are important landmarks in its growth and development. Two temples, of a later date, the Mahadev temple at Nachna and the brick temple of Lakshman at Sirpur, carry the process of development and elaboration still further so that by the eighth century the *Nagar* style is well evolved in its typical form and features. By that time, the earlier stunted *shikhar* had already been elongated into a gracefully curving and tall spire to which an *amalak* had been added. The face and walls had begun to carry niches and bands of sculpture. The device of setting forward the middle of each side of the square had been tried out as also that of separating the walls of the cell from those of the spire through recessed friezes. The temples of that period are still small in size and the era of sculptural profusion is not yet; but, in its essentials, the style has come of age. At this stage, the *nagar* is taken over, as it were, for an amazing process of refashioning and refining first by the Orissan and then by the Chandel architects, so that the Lingraj and Kandariya Mahadev are created almost at the same point of time, around A.D. 1000. As is well known, these two are not only among the foremost temples in

the Northern style but count among the best in all India. In the *Nagar* category, certainly, these mark the point of perfection.

Before we discuss and examine the architecture of the sanctuaries at Khajuraho, let us pause to take note of the general form and symbolism of the Indo-Aryan style of temples which the Chandel craftsmen inherited and worked upon. As we have seen, these – the form and the symbols – had been evolving for several centuries. By the time the first of the greater temples of Khajuraho came to be constructed, almost all the philosophic ingredients had been thought out and each structural component tried at some place or the other, in one or more examples of the species. Largely, therefore, the task of the architects of Jaijakbhukti lay in a judicious selection from that which was available, and their merit in the skilful co-ordination of what they chose. In all this they succeeded in a striking measure. They created a distinctive design for their handiwork and, in a case or two, put up monuments of near-perfection which still stand to testify to their great aesthetic gifts and their remarkable architectural genius.

The simplest structural arrangement of the Hindu temple consists of a cella (*garbhgrih*), where the deity is installed for the worshipper to commune with. Since the ritual of worship is a personal matter, this is the essential element. All else, even a roof or a porch, is mere elaboration. Indeed, even the enclosing walls of the cella are not absolutely necessary. Thus a *shivling* standing in the open or a Hanuman chalked out on a rock might be all that the devotee needs, for where the god is, there is the temple. Then, as the theological concepts underwent change, the idea of the temple as the terrestrial dwelling place of the god developed. Already, the forces of nature which were, for the Aryan, his gods, whom he honoured and appeased through oblations on the sacrificial altar, had been anthropomorphised. Both these bases were wide enough to yield the richest possibilities in respect of ritual and structure. Obviously – as in heaven, so upon this earth – the deity must have a fitting residence, a *prasad*, a palace worthy of the celestial being who is the object of our homage. And also, man would, from innate love for God and a sense of dedication, lavish on the deity all that is his. Thus the grandiose temple took shape. In this matter, the process of the growth and development of the Hindu temple is not different from that which obtains for holy buildings all the world over. There is the view that "it is not that God wants a grand house to live in but it is that man finds his truest happiness only in dedicating his best work to God." Ruskin makes this point in glowing terms:

"The Church has no need of any visible splendours ; her power is independent of them ; her purity is in some degree opposed to them. The simplicity of a pastoral sanctuary is lovelier than the majesty of an urban temple, and it may be more than questioned whether, to the people, such majesty has ever been the source of any increase of effective piety ; but to the builders it has been and must ever be. It is not the Church we want, but the sacrifice ; not the emotion of admiration but the act of adoration ; not the gift but the giving."[22]

Along with this desire to dedicate there is also, in man, the longing to outlive his

mortality. One of the ways of doing that is to build in rhyme or lasting stone, to draw or sculpt ; in short, to rely upon art to keep his memory after he has gone the way of all flesh. This is true not only of the great temples and tombs, mosques and churches, palaces and other civil structures of later or greater cultures , even in the ancient cromlechs and dolmens of imperishable stone-some sublime through sheer weight and size-we find a desire to defy the decree that human life shall be transient. In the field of religious edifices, certainly, the spirit of giving to one's god, and the urge to cheat Time, to immortalise oneself, to create eternity out of an instant—these have combined to make generation upon generation of men put up for their Maker, "misty masses of multitudinous pinnacle and diademed tower" ; so that in Ruskin's words, "they have taken with them to the graves their powers, their honours and their errors, but they have left us their adoration."

The idea that the temple represented a palace-cum-court of the deity was the most dominant factor in determining the structural development of the temple. To the cella was added a *mandap*, porch, which, artistically, imparted elegance , symbolically it became the waiting-hall or the assembly-room for the devotees , and, commonsensically, it afforded shelter to the temple-goer from rain and heat. Thus do the requirements of art, the dictates of commonsense, and the symbols and rituals of faith, often combine to provide a base and reason for masterstrokes of development and elaboration. The architect would add a column for additional support, or put up an extra *mandap* for size and splendour , the *shikhar* was evolved while solving his roofing problem, and a bracket devised for beauty and strength. The priest, full of fancy and avid for theorising, read meaning and symbol into everything and, attaching significance to every addition, sanctified all that came along. No better co-operation and understanding have ever been possible between art and religion than what obtained between the Brahmin and the craftsman, so that it is true to say, in the case of the best achievements of India, that the temple is at once an artistic whole as well as a theological entity. Nothing that forms a part of the temple is superfluous or out of place either from the viewpoint of the most exacting architectural standards or the most elaborate religious symbolism

There is yet another important aspect which deserves notice. Mythology explains how the entire ground over which the body of the *asur*, *Vastu*, lies is holy; and upon that body the gods reside, so that the temple is literally, *Vastupurush*, the Body of God. But apart from this horizontal spread of the temple being a body, another way of equating the temple with the divine was evolved. Once the *shikhar* was devised, the form of the deity was seen in the vertical as well as it had been read in the horizontal. The *shikhar* became the head, and the rest of the components, the neck, the trunk, the thighs and the feet followed naturally. With the *mukut*, crown, atop the *shikhar*, the temple assumed the form now of Vishnu now of Shiv. Indeed, following a text which says, "*shikharasya tu bheden sarvesham bhedamudishyte*" (one should be able to point out the differences of all [temples] from the differences of their *shikhars*), scholars like Havell would use the design of the *shikhar* for differentiating between the types of temples, between the Vaishnav and the Shaiv, the former

claiming the North Indian style and the latter, the Southern. It may be remarked in passing that, generally true or not, this formula does not apply to the temples at Khajuraho. There such sameliness of design obtains in respect of the temples, dedicated not only to Vishnu or Shiv but also to the Jain gods, that, in the words of Fergusson, "it requires very great familiarity to distinguish them." Perhaps the sectarian approach has never been tenable in regard to Hindu art and, as .O.C. Gangoly points out, "on the whole, the different forms, whatever their origins, have been indiscriminately employed by adherents of different cults and religious beliefs. And though employed by adherents of different creeds, it cannot be definitely asserted that any particular form has derived its origin from any particular religious sect. Thus, it is a misnomer to designate any type of Indian architecture as specifically Buddhistic, Jain, or Brahminical. It is Indian architecture for the time being in the service of one or other religion prevailing at a particular place or time. Thus the archaic Vedic mounds, dating before the Buddhist periods, came to be adopted by the Buddhists for their Dagobas, relic-shrines, or Stupas. Similarly, the Northern Indian Nagara tower shrines not only serve as Shiva and Vishnu temples, but also as the 'image-house' for many Jain temples at Khajuraho."[23]

To go back, however, to the matter of the temple being the body of god. As it stands, the Hindu temple is so obviously regarded as a body that it is customary to use terms like *jangha*, *griva* and *mastak*—thigh , neck and forehead—in normal constructional vocabulary. Further, the temple is a body, an image, in the sense that it is not only required to carry the images of the gods who reside on the *Vastu*, but such is the scheme of things, that the entire temple is one colossal image. Gangoly explains this point thus "Indian architecture always attempts to cover the form necessitated by its structural scheme under the cloak of a symbol ; and its decided inclination is to achieve a plastic pattern. Fundamentally an image-house, the Indian temple aspires to the form of the image itself. This sculptural form is almost a habit with the Indian architect. The Buddhist Stupa is not merely an elaborate casket for a holy relic but easily symbolises the image of a seated Buddha, with his head crowned by a series of concentric Chattras. The long perpendicular lines of the Vimana of the Lingaraja temple with its stately crown of Amalaka is the true picture of a gigantic Siva Lingam, not merely a stone covering for it. The typical temple of the Khajuraho group with its shoulders spread out, looks like a veritable image of Vishnu, carrying an elegant Mukuta."[24] Just as well ; for the descent of the *Vastupurush* has to be redeemed by an ascent. That is why religion lays down explicit instructions that the temple is to be worshipped as *Purush*, and the Golden One at that, and the various components of the temple are likened to the parts of the human body. In her great work, *The Hindu Temple*, Stella Kramrisch writes at length on both these aspects of the temple, its representing the Body and the ascent of the Supreme Being "The temple as house and seat of God in which dwells His Essence is also His body ; the temple contains the whole manifestation in which He is beheld as Purusa, Supernal Man. 'The Prasada should be worshipped as Purusa.' It is both, His house and representation. The several parts of the temple communicate His living presence

and are likened to the body of man in the same way as the square of the plan and its partitions are the 'body' of the Vastupurusa. The door is the mouth, the Amalaka or the High Dome is the head ; its Brahmarandhra or foramen is pierced so as to receive the tenon (kila) of the finial (stupika). The image in the Garbhgrah is the Life (jiva) of the temple concealed in the darkness of the cave, enclosed by the mountain of its walls. The outside of the bulwark, teeming with ordered shapes and figures, is its explicit form. The temple is conceived from inside and visualized from outside ; the communication between inside and outside is brought about by the radiating power from within which assigns its place to each and every facet of the walls ; the inner dark is extracted through closed doors and windows (Ghanadvara and Gavaksa) as a chiaroscuro which adheres to the Prasada extended in mid-space and facing all the directions. Tier upon tier in a solidified ascent, its bulk is reduced in the tapering superstructure and carried towards the Paramount Point...

"When the building is completed and consecrated, its effigy in the shape of a golden man, the Prasada - purusa is installed in the Golden jar, above the Garbhgrah, above the Sukanasa. The effigy is invested with all the Forms and Principles of manifestation. While the Vastupurusa 'Existence' lies at the base of the temple and is its support, the Golden Purusa of the Prasada, its indwelling Essence, sum total of all the Forms and Principles (tattva) of manifestation and their reintegration lies in the superluminous darkness of the Golden jar on top of the temple below the point limit of the manifest. In supernal radiance, the golden Purusa of the Vedic Altar appears raised from the golden disc—of the sun—within the bottom layer of the Agni to the finial above the superstructure of the Hindu temple. The ascension of the Golden Purusa cancels the descent of the Vastupurusa.

"Within these two movements the Hindu temple has its being ; its central pillar is erected from the heart of the Vastupurusa in the Brahmasthana, from the centre and heart of Existence on earth, and supports the Prasada Purusa in the Golden jar in the splendour of the Empyrean. Its mantle carries, imaged in its varied texture, in all directions all the forms and principles of manifestation toward the Highest Point above the body of the Temple."[26]

It is against this background of such a comprehensive and complicated concept of the *prasad* that the structural modifications of the Hindu temple have to be viewed and understood. The deity must be housed and housed well; therefore a grand building must be raised. He must be fed; therefore there shall be a *bhogmandap*, the banquet-hall . He must be entertained, therefore there shall be a *natyamandap*, the dance-hall. The walls of the temple carry other deities sculptured all over; therefore there shall be a circumambulatory passage; and so on and so forth. In respect of the components of the superstructure, the Indian's innate inclination to give "monumental expression to metaphysical symbolism," or, less charitably, the Brahmin's propensity to build up an elaborate structure of speculation and significance on every new element introduced by the architect, has produced a vast ocean of symbol and meaning, such that here only a gem or two can be presented to indicate the general approach in the matter. It has been stated earlier that among the distinctive features of

the *Nagar* temple are its curvilinear spire, and the *amalak* and the *kalash*. Something has been said, too, about the spire and its symbolism of the cosmic churning rod or Mount Meru which connects the earth with heaven. For all we can say, Louis Frederic's guess may be correct and possibly the *shikhar* was thought up as a help in solving the perplexing problem of roofing, and later on invested with elaborate religious signification by the priest. But whatever the explanation, the fact remains that everywhere in the world, the spire is the symbol of man's urge to reach out to the skies, to the Divine.

The *kalash*, the water-pot or auspicious jar, is, symbolically, the container of the nectar, the drink of immortality, churned out from the cosmic ocean. It is the prize to which the devotee aspires. This reached, the worlds of death and decay, which are also part of the universe embodied in the temple, will touch him not. The jar, required by the canons to be of gold, although other metals like silver or copper may be used, is likened to the golden sun which rests on the Mount Meru of the temple. It is a sun that never sets, and in this sun, the *kalash*, "all the gods are merged in the Deathless". This renders sacred the *amalak*, the ribbed ring of stone which is the ring of spotless rays encircling the golden orb of the *kalash*-sun. A most beautiful as well as, functionally, a most useful component, the *amalak* is a very rich and complex symbol. It has many meanings and many uses. It denotes pure stone as well as Pure Essence. "It is the door of liberation, the symbol of denoting entry and final integration. It is identified with the cosmic egg, and with the fruit of the Emblic Myrobalan whose shape it remotely recalls."[26] Of this tree it is said that "it is the first tree grown in the universe. Vishnu is seated at its bottom ; Brahma above and Shiv higher still. The Sun is in its branches, the gods are in their ramifications and in its leaves, flowers and fruits. Thus the *Amalaka* is the support of all gods."[27]

And if the *kalash* and the *amalak* are such rich and rewarding symbols, the *shikhar* beats them both. As a concrete symbol of man's longing towards the High, as a universally accepted indication of the desire of the dust for the Divine, the spire and the tower, the *shikhar* and the *minar*, are common to almost all religious architecture. But, for the Hindu, they acquired additional significance because of the rich and plentiful mythological associations. We have observed that the temple symbolises the mountains like Mandar, Meru and Kailash and in its most elaborate and fully developed state, where it becomes practically the entire roof over the *garbhgrih* and is not merely a part of the superstructure, the *shikhar* would itself be identified with these symbols. Mythologically, these stand for ascent ; for access to paradise, for the union of the human with the Brahman, the terrestrial with the celestial ; for *moksh*, release, through reaching out to and partaking of the drink immortal which the *kalash* above contains. Through these links with mythology, the mountain which, as a symbol, is basic and primal to all faiths of the world, is invested with manifold meaning. The Mandar served as the churning rod for the gods and the demons in their joint venture of extracting the immortality-conferring nectar from the cosmic ocean. The Kailash is the abode and heaven of the god Shiv who is, for many, the god of gods. The Meru is the world-mountain which, passing through the centre of

the earth, connects the lower regions with the upper, and on the top of which rests *swarg*, the dwelling of divine beings. It is the pillar of the universe and inheres naturally in the microcosm of the temple. The idea of the pillar belongs to the Vedic times. In the sacrifices of the Aryans, it was companion to their altar which has also been incorporated in the total concept of the temple. Understandably so, for in the phase of its resurgence, and in its bold bid to oust all other rivals, Hinduism took over all the available material, Aryan as well as non-Aryan, and refashioned its creed and concepts. This is especially true of temple building and temple ritual, in respect of which the position is summed up admirably by Stella Kramrisch. "India not only thinks in images. It builds them up in a consistent body of which the sum total is the temple. It takes them from the store house of memory ; similar forms once used in sacred rites meet, fuse, are absorbed the one in the other and contribute their particular meaning to the new context. The small space of the garbhagrha is extracted from various confines and placed within the walls of the Prasada. The dolmen, from the aboriginal side, has been incorporated into the Prasada and raised on a socle (adhisthana) so that it is ensconced within its mountainous shape, and similarly, from the Vedic tradition, the sacrificial shed, as an enclosed ritual place, shares in its closeness as much as the images of the cave in the mountain, of the heart and the womb."[28]

And in regard to the form which the pillar took as the *shikhar* of temples like those at Khajuraho . "The other shape of the Sikhara has its perfect appearance in temples such as those in Khajuraho. It surges towards the apex ; other smaller Sikharas cling to it in a massed competition of ascent. Although each of them has its edges marked by Bhumis of many strata and by Amalakas, these horizontal elements like the nodules of the stem of a plant, do not break its rising lines Their curves belong to forms of vegetation, the ribs of the large leaves of Banana plants, of palm trees or bamboo rods fixed in the corners of a square drawn on the ground and bent towards a central point , with their curves the stone-built Sikharas of the Khajuraho temples arise and reiterate in their complex organisation the perennial meaning of the Tabernacle of the forest. It served and still serves the performance of worship (puja) and vows (vrata). When these Pujas and Vratas are completed, the leaves and branches which had formed the Tabernacle, having served their purpose, are thrown away, whereas the form of these temporary and humble structures was clothed in brick and stone and raised above the Garbhagrha, in the innumerable Sikharas known to exist from the Gupta age and which to this day compete towards the Highest Point.

"The Tabernacle of leaves, bamboo or branches is the prototype of the curvilinear Sikhara. The arch of vegetation, the arch of Nature surmounts and encloses the seat of God. In temple chariots with a framework of bamboo, as much as in the temples themselves, it is this 'Form of Nature', which remains one of the primeval and sempiternal forms of sacred architecture in India. It is the most sacred of all the forms of the superstructure, destined for the Prasada only. It is never placed as superstructure on any Mandapa or any accessory building of the temple proper. There the pyramidal types are accommodated, and at times assimilated to its curves, without however attaining to their unbroken ascent."[29]

The *Meru*, pillar of the universe, runs through the centre of the cella and rises up to the finial and beyond, to the seat of the Supreme ; and, as it rises aloft, it strings and sweeps along its flight all the various symbolic components of the superstructure. As we have seen, these components have their own significance and purpose and, together, they all make a complex of myth and meaning which is rich but difficult to grasp. We quote once again from Stella Kramrisch's *The Hindu Temple* which gives a most learned and lucid exposition of all this. "The vertical axis of the Prasada leads from the Highest Point, the summit of its finial, above its body, to the centre of the Garbhagrha. It is not visible from outside, except where it emerges from the body of the superstructure, having the appearance of a horizontal section of a pillar, round as a rule but also polygonal. This pillar is also not visible from inside the Garbhagrha which, as a rule, has a flat ceiling. None the less it inheres in the Prasada : however solid a monument its superstructure is, it traverses it like a hollow reed. On whatever level the Garbhagrha is situated this hollow reed passes through its centre. The pillar inheres in the Prasada, which is the universe in a likeness. The Pillar of the Universe, the Axis Mundi, inheres in the World Mountain. All its strata are placed along its axis and their totality is the sheath of the Pillar. It has the shape of the Prasada

"The pillar within the Temple corresponds to the vertical channel marked by the Svayamatrnna stones of the Fire Altar. In it move the immanent breaths of earth, air and heaven, to the heaven-light. The Agni finally is bestrewn with chips of gold , the finial too, shines golden above the multiform body and raiment of the temple.

"The World Pillar inheres in the World Mountain and transcends it where it becomes visible above the highest stratum of the superstructure. The mountain shape of the Prasada is the sheath of its vertical axis. The vertical axis is clothed in it, from the floor of the Garbhagrha to the shoulder course of the superstructure ; from there however it is seen to exceed the body of the superstructure (Sikhara, in Nagara temples ; the series of Bhumis in Dravida temples). Encased in the vertical shape of a pillar, which is circular, as a rule, or polygonal, it transcends the slopes of the superstructure although for a short distance only. It is therefore called Griva or Neck. It emerges from the body of the Prasada to be capped by a dome or clasped by an Amalaka. These crowning shapes of the Pillar support the finial of the temple. Its Highest Point, the end or beginning of the axis of the temple, is in the centre of the hollow shaft above the Linga or image in the Garbhagrha, above the Womb and Centre of the Cosmos and above the Navel of the Earth.

"The finial is beyond the body of the temple, which has its extension in Antariksa, the mid-space. Above its High Temples (harmya) and cupole (sikhara) ; above its being gathered by the Amalaka rises the finial, the Stupika, in the Empyrean and up to the Bindu, its Highest Point, the limit between the unmanifest and the manifest."[30]

Now the *Meru* is listed in the *Shastrs* as one of the types of the temples, and, equated generally with Mount meru. The *prasad*, which is of this type, will be a "mountain" par excellence. The temples of Khajuraho made of stone, the substance of the mountain, and built by Kshatris who alone may build the *merus*,

belong to this species, and, fittingly therefore, their *shikhars*, symbolic everywhere of the mountain peaks, are a great achievement. Superb in their grace and grandeur, distinct in their design and structure, they constitute, in a temple like the Kandariya Mahadev, the culmination of the *nagar* style. Once again, the trial and experiment had been made earlier and elsewhere, in Gujarat and Rajasthan and Orissa ; as such, nothing new was thought out, except the combination, the perfection of that which the Central Indian craftsman received from his precursors.

Indeed, nothing finer has been achieved in this field. Composed of a series of excellently disposed *shrings* and *urushrings*, main and subsidiary spires, the super-structure images a cluster of mountain peaks. In the more mature examples, these towers and spires are arranged, rising and falling alternately and yet maintaining the steady and graded ascent of a majestic mountain. Fitting admirably into the temple's overall design of elevation and accentuation, which begins from the high platform on which each sanctuary stands and which is carried on consistently throughout the construction, these *shikhars* and *angshikhars* create an effect of surpassing loveliness. What is more, the Chandel craftsmen have yet once again succeeded in extracting beauty out of utility, for the many spires divide between them the weight of the superstructure which sits lighter upon the building than would have been the case if the total mass and volume had heen concentrated into one *shikhar*. All in all, the tall curvilinear *shikhar* of the Khajuraho shrines reaches out as a superb achievement and deserves fully the lyrical praise which eminent critics have lavished on it. Benjamin Rowland contributes the following delineation: The spires at Khajuraho are domical rather than pyramidal in contour. The curvature of the sikharas is more accelerated and impelling than those of eastern India, and a refinement peculiar to the architecture of Khajuraho is to be seen in the turrets or urusringas let into the masonry of the main tower at successive levels of its construction ; so that in the duplication, and even triplication, of these towerd shapes there is almost the effect of the eyes travelling from lesser ranges to the summit of a distant mountain. The whole mass of the sikhara is a kind of wonderful rising crescendo of curves, the curves of the lesser turrets and the ribs of the main tower having their separate points of intersection, and yet leading inevitably to the amalaka that at once crowns and girdles the whole."[31]

Stella Kramrisch describes and commends, in more technical terms, this component of the *Nagar* temple : "The Sikhara has two main shapes ...One... consists of a central curvilinear Sikhara surrounded by clusters of similar Sikharas. These are formed by one or several half Sikharas or Srngas leaning against the 'chest' (uras) of the main Sikhara and of each successive Uromanjari. At the corners, narrow and high quarter-Sikharas fill and round off the recesses between the Uromanjaris and the main Sikhara (mula-Sikhara or Manjari), while smaller part or three-quarter Srngas are grouped in the lower courses of the Sikhara each in continuation of a buttress or offset of the perpendicular wall of the Prasada. The many variations of the theme of the Sikhara cluster are brought about by the number of Uromanjaris of the Sikhara, the number of Rathas or offsets of the perpendicular wall and the number of horizontal rows in which are set the miniature Sikharas called Tilaka (sesamum seed) at the base

of the main Sikhara, the Mulamanjari. These factors depend on the specific proportions of the particular type of temple and also on its height and the curvature of the superstructure. All the subsidiary Sikharas and other shapes are always subordinated to the main and dominant central Mulamanjari...

"They ascend moreover from the corners, and each time to the same height as the respective Uromanjaris ; they are accompanied furthermore in this massed competition towards the apex, by lesser replicas at the base, attaining to smaller fractions of the height while they reinforce on their own lower levels the urgency of the ascent. Each of these multiple replicas has a 'neck' (griva), Amalaka and finial of its own ; while these terminate the single forms, they punctuate the striving of the entire mass of the superstructure towards the final point which lies beyond its trunk, whatever its height. The single Srngas, as a rule, are spaced with increasing distances towards the top whereas the single Bhumis or horizontal courses of which each Srnga is composed, decrease in height towards the summit of the Sikhara. A counter-play of proportions results from this double progression, contracting on the upper register of the wall surfaces of each Srnga and expanding with reference to the superstructure as a whole. Its tension makes even more ostensibly coherent the substantiality of the monument whose texture thus is seen not as that of the stone or the bricks but appears to be composed of the acceleration and the halting of the ascent.

"Temples of this type are represented most perfectly in central India, especially in Khajuraho..."[32]

Apart from the explanations already suggested, the term *Nagar* claims one more : temple for the cities. The *shastrs* said that "prasadas of stone and baked brick should be built for the adornment of towns". Arriving at a certain stage of power and prosperity, the Chandel rulers must have thought, quite naturally, of adorning their town. In any case, religion had enjoined : "Let him who wishes to enter the worlds that are reached by sacrificial offerings and the performance of religious obligations build a temple to the gods, by doing which he obtains both the results of sacrifice and the performance of religious obligations". This was incentive enough, and as soon as the gods smiled upon the kings of Khajuraho, these favoured mortals began the work from piety and gratitude. Sacrificing, if necessary, secular luxury to religious magnificence, they put up monuments which have earned them undying fame. The building material was available nearby, at Panna ; the craftsmen of the Pratihars could be commissioned ; and there were designs in Central India as well as in Orissa to the east, and Rajasthan and Gujarat to the west, from where the Khajuraho pattern would be evolved.

The Orissan artists were developing a many-halled sanctuary and a *shikhar* of imposing height ; and the Khajuraho monuments borrowed some of their general characteristics from the temples at Bhubaneshwar and elsewhere in Orissa. In Rajasthan several features were being experimented with which the Chandel temple was to take over. These included the balconied transepts, and openings, and the more ornate ceilings and pillars of the interior. Indeed, in respect of the exterior architectural plan, in the designing and compartmentation of the interior as well as in the ornamental and sculptural element, the monuments of Khajuraho display a closer affinity with some of

the temples of Rajasthan than with those of Orissa with which they are generally compared. Their indebtedness apart, the Chandel craftsmen displayed many strokes of genius whereby their work has acquired a distinctiveness all its own. In the first instance, they gave their temple a high platform. This lifts the monument and, since there are no enclosures, no surrounding walls of any kind, it creates the impression of offering the temple to the deity. The absence of an enclosure is remarkable. It contradicts the sweeping statement of a visitor like Margaret Mordecai that "in India no external effect is intended or desired. Temple, palace, mosque and tomb are reverently, lovingly guarded from the outside world. Each and every monument of Indian art was screened behind high walls like a jewel in a casket."[33] But at Khajuraho the casket and the jewel are not apart and separate, for the exterior is profusely ornamented with pleasing sculptures and, in certain cases, with such sculptures that, in the opinion of some, enclosures might have been the right thing after all. Anyway, the platform serves to impart some height to the structure and commences that process of accentuation and verticality which is the bias of the entire design. The various components of the horizontal ground-plan, though they conform to the Orissan pattern, are telescoped, at floor-level as well as that of the roofs, into a compact entity, so that, instead of giving an impression of disjointed compartments, they make an architectural whole. Further, unlike the Orissan monuments with their plain interiors, the temples of Khajuraho possess a wealth of plastic splendour within, and these sculptural riches are lighted up through a most skilful device of providing beautiful balconied openings. This most attractive feature is novel to these temples and has received just praise. Finally, there is that amalgam of grace and majesty, the soaring *shikhar*, with its picturesque pattern of multiple spires.

In its entirety, the general design would be exemplified only by the main temples like the Lakshman, the Kandariya Mahadev, the Devi Jagdamba, the Chitrgupt, the Vishvanath, the Parshvanath etc. There are several small shrines which, insignificant little things, serve merely to mark the stages of development and come nowhere near the above-named, more opulent structures distinguished by a large spread, exquisite design, and lavish ornamentation. The greater temples represent also the phase of Chandel power and glory when the dynasty, which started with dedicating a most humble temple like Lalguan to Shiv, could build a whole and goodly shrine even for the Lord's *vahan*, Nandi. Further, in these larger fanes, there are four smaller, subsidiary shrines, one at each corner, dedicated to the other members of the *panchayat* of the Hindu gods, which surround the more imposing central sanctuary of the deity of the temple. Again, in the case of these fully developed temples, the superficial division of the temples into Shaiv, Vaishnav, and Jain bears little relationship with their architecture, so that the distinguishing of one from the other has to be on the basis of the worshipped within the cella, and not on that of any particular, structural or stylistic, variations.

The typical Khajuraho monument is built of fine-grained sandstone, buff, pale-yellow or pinkish in colour, which was quarried and carried from Panna, today the air terminus for Khajuraho. Some of the earlier structures, the Chaunsath-yogini dedicated to the Devi and her sixty-four attendants, the Brahma and the

Lalguan-Mahadev, are constructed wholly or partly of granite. Some scholars determine the chronology of the temples by reference to the material or proportion of various materials used for their construction. Others rely on the differences and variations of style. In style, the Brahma and the Lalguan, howsoever cruder and smaller in size than the greater, more developed specimens, are also in the Khajuraho mode of construction. The temples that do not conform to this classification are, in addition to the hypaethral Chaunsathyogini, the Matangeshwar, the Varah, and, of course, modern shrines like the one in the Jain Kshetr. All the rest are of a uniform design and, in the words of Krishna Deva, "pertain to a cognate style and are manifestations of a distinctive and concerted architectural movement, differing only in details of expression."[34]

This 'cognate style' consists of a most skilfully co-ordinated horizontal spread and a vertical upsurge. In size, the temples are rather small, the largest, Kandariya Mahadev, being just 100 ft high and 66 ft long. The design, which aims at a neat compactness, seems to reduce the size still further. The merit, therefore, of the architect lay in the admirable structural plan, which is a miracle of beauty and utility, and in the fine moulding of the plastic element, whether of the architectural variety, including the subsidiary spire, supporting brackets and the ceiling pendants, or that which constitutes the sculptural ornamentation.

The structural analysis may be taken up, for the sake of convenience, in stages. First, take the ground-plan. This has the form of a Latin cross. In technical terms, the temples are known as *nirandhar* or *sandhar*, respectively, depending upon whether they have one pair of transepts or two. The *nirandhar* has four compartments, the *sandhar*, five. The four compartments are the *ardhmandap*, an entrance-porch, the *mandap*, an assembly hall, the *antaral*, vestibule, and the *garbhgrih*, cella, where the deity is installed. A fifth compartment, the *mahamandap*, which has an ambulatory passage is added in the *sandhar* temples. All the temples have but one entrance, which faces east, and the compartments, wheather four or five, lead from one to the other ; but the floor of each succeeding part is on a higher level so that the last, the *garbhgrih*, is placed at the highest floor-level. In addition, the steps which link one compartment to the other, as well as the steps at the entrance, help to impart more height to each compartment and add to the total effect of verticality.

This vertical movement, this upward pull, is evident all over. It begins with the solid masonry *jagati*, platform, on which each temple stands. This open, spacious and lofty terrace is one of the distinguishing features of the temples of Khajuraho. The platform is held firmly through a series of ornamental mouldings of the basement storey, the *adhishthan*, of the temple. The mouldings make the base beautiful as well as stable, and set in that fine interplay of light and shade which is a constant motif of the entire construction. In architectural jargon, the position of the structure below the *shikhar* is *saptang*, made up of seven segments, with two series of mouldings of the *adhishthan*, the base, and three sculptured registers on the *jangha*, with two intervening sets of *bandhan* mouldings. This disposes of the basement storey and the central zone of the walls enclosing the various compartments. It is not walls alone which constitute the

portion between the base and the superstructure. Actually, a most effective device has been employed—that of inter-setting balconied openings. These make for a picturesque contrast of voids and solids as well as admit air and light into the shrine. Critics have given high praise to this masterly idea. Of this part of the structure, Percy Brown says: "The intermediate portion of the building above this (basement storey) is handled in an equally artistic manner. Where the remaining surfaces of the structure are solid, here the builder has introduced his voids, consisting of a horizontal range of window openings, thus, bringing in light and air, and at the same time throwing a vivid band of intense shadow athwart the whole composition. There are few more attractive conceptions in the field of Indian architecture than these lovely balconied openings, and few, either structurally or aesthetically, more appropriate to their purpose."[35] And Krishna Deva: "The balconied windows, canopied by overhanging eaves, admit light and air into the interior and form beautiful openings for the inner compartments. The solid wall-spaces in between them are studded with two or more horizontal bands of statuary of exquisite grace and charm, which constitute the most attractive feature of the Khajuraho temples. The deep shadows, cast over the whole composition by the beautiful balconied windows, and the light and shade over the sculptural bands, following the alternate projections and recesses of the indented plan, indeed produce a highly picturesque effect."[36]

We shall talk of these bands of statuary a little later. For the present let us continue with our examination of the structure as a whole and mark the emphasis on accentuation which governs the total concept. First, the emphatically high plinth, and then the central position giving the effect of loftiness and verticality; and finally, the superstructure consisting of the *griva* (the neck); the *shikhars*, both main and subsidiary; *amalaks*, *chandrshila* (moonstone step), *kalash*—all these, every one of these, as well as the plastic ornament, are part and parcel of this pattern and process of accentuation. The total is simply superb. Even as the floors within are so set that each of them is at a higher level than the preceeding one, so are the roofs, without, a series of rising tiers, each growing from another, heightening the illusion of verticality, and directing, as it were, the eye of the worshipper along graded peaks to the summit. But a far more dazzling and sure instrument of achieving the vertical effect is the wonderful design of spires and turrets, *shikhars* and *urushikhars*, which the inspired craftsmen devised. Each roof is covered with a cluster of these arranged in a raise-and-break design of full and half replica-turrets with a maxium congregation on the roof over the sanctum. There the crescendo culminates. Nothing could have emphasised the vertical surge better than these *shrings* and *angshrings*. And to each of these graceful *shikhars* is given an *amalak* and a *kalash* which are as ornamental an addition as they are meaningful. All in all, these add up to a total composition which is about the last word in curvilinear grace. We have already quoted a few expert opinions and excellent tributes to this part of the Khajuraho temple. One or two more deserve to be added. Here is Percy Brown: "The touchstone of the Indo-Aryan type of temple is the design of the spire, and the examples of this dominating feature at Khajuraho are the most refined and elegant of their kind. The graceful shape of these shikaras

has been effected in two ways, on the one hand by the subtle lineament of the main curves, and on the other by the rhythmic disposal of the subsidiary members attached to them. It is only necessary to compare the Khajuraho form of shikara with the Orissan type to realize the beauty of the former with its flowing profile. In the first place the contours at Khajuraho are more taut and tenuous, the tempo of the lines is accelerated as they mount up in a more decided incline. But the principal refinement is obtained by the design and distribution of the miniature turrets or *urusringas*, which it was the practice to superimpose on the sides to break up the mass. The manner in which the craftsmen at Khajuraho played, and even juggled with these elements in the formation of the shikara is proof of a long apprenticeship to this kind of work."[37] And Havell is all admiration for this magnificent, imaginative power and technical skill with which "pinnacle upon pinnacle, crowned with Vishnu's lotus emblem, are piled round the central tower of the shrine to give the impression of the holy mountain upholding the highest heavens."[38]

Let us now have a look at the interior. Entering through the only door, facing east, one finds that the four principal apartments are linked together in a compact manner, each opening on or leading to the next one in such a way that the passage slopes upwards with each successive *mandap*. Although no longer extant in many of the temples still standing, a *makar-toran*, an ornamental archway, prefaced the entrance-portico. In the specimens which exist, the *toran* is lavishly carved and very ornate and "so finely fashioned as to appear more like ivory carving, or even a hanging drapery than chiselled stone."[39] The *ardhmandap* is a rectangular apartment, usually a modest thing, with the roof carried on dwarf pillars, and is open on three sides. Similar in respect of the last two points, the *mahamandap* which is the main hall is a far richer compartment. Two features relating to this hall deserve notice. The first, the transept sporting the balconied openings, has already been mentioned. Then there are, in the centre, four pillars which, functionally, support the beams of the roof, and, aesthetically, provide scope for some very artistic sculptural decoration on capitals, architrave, and ceiling, in line with the ornate doorways.

The *mahamandap* connects with a vestibule called the *antaral*, which leads, through an ornate doorway, into the sanctum. The cella, where the deity rests, is plain within; but the door is carved, like the one outside. These carven doors and the sculptural wealth of the *mahamandap* convert the interior of the Khajuraho temple into a storehouse of beauty which contrasts, to an advantage, with the severely plain interiors of the Orissan temples. Whereas we shall deal with this whole subject of Khajuraho's sculpture a little later and at length, here let us take note of two rather remarkable aspects, both of which indicate that the workmen possessed consummate skill and an uncommon sense of beauty. The ceilings, showing a design of overlapping concentric courses, resemble the celebrated ceilings of the Jain temples at Abu. Cusped and coffered elegantly, the ceilings carry elaborate floral and geometrical patterns of what are known as *kola* and *gajatalu* courses all arranged in shell-shapes and intersecting circles with exquisite pendants."[40] To make a ceiling into an ornament appears to have been a convention of some

sanctity, for temples all over the country exhibit these, although in many cases the dark interior would show almost nothing of this beautiful addition. What is more, it appears that this was a highly specialised item so that "the preparation of these and the fixing of them in position were in the hands of a separate guild of craftsmen who specialised in this particular kind of work."[41] And more striking than these ceilings are the bracket-figures of lovely *apsaras* and *salbhanjikas* alternating with grotesque creatures, which helps create a queer contrast of beauty and ugliness.

For the sake of a clearer analysis and better understanding, so far we have been considering the Khajuraho temple horizontally and vertically, but, in point of fact, this approach is most unsatisfactory, for in the Chandel monument, both these, the ground plan and the elevation, have been admirably integrated into an exquisite whole. Indeed, there is evidence of great technical skill as well as of a marvellous sense of design and direction in the arrangement of the horizontals and the verticals, even as these gifts show up in the patterns of light and shade, and voids and solids noted earlier. Though the governing motif is verticality—the temple being the *meru*, etc.—which is repeatedly emphasised through terrace and tower, through rising roofs and soaring spires, yet this accentuation and upsurge are put in perfect balance with the horizontal in ways which leave one in no doubt of the technical mastery and aesthetic judgement of the craftsmen of Khajuraho. There is an overall effect of well-proportioned creation, of an instinct for the right measure, correct even to a hair's breadth. Part of the pattern which helps to produce this balance is the sculptural ornament, whether of the bands and friezes which go round the *jangha* or of the mouldings and recesses elsewhere, but there is much more to the making of the visual loveliness of these monuments than can be counted off. One can only summarise the impression as Rowland does: "In general, it could be said that the enormous effectiveness of the shrines at Khajuraho depends on their beauty of proportion and contour and the vibrant texture of their surface ornamentation. The plan is generally that of a cross with the entrance at the east and one or two transepts radiating from the cella. In this plan the garbha griha and mandapas are only cells of a unified organism. The dominant impression of the Khajuraho shrines is that of a number of separate superstructures, each with its amalaka finial building up to a great mountain of masonry The vertical is emphasized throughout, from the high base through the successive walls and roofs to the ultimate range of lesser peaks that constitute the main spire. These temples may also be regarded as a perfect balance of vertical and horizontal volumes with the vertical ascent interrupted by friezes of dynamic figure sculpture girdling the entire structure."[42]

Of these sculptural friezes, indeed of all sculpture at Khajuraho, we have spoken little so far, and that deliberately. As has been observed several times, the exquisite figures of grace and beauty which adorn these temples constitute their most attractive feature. Withal, the monuments display such an abundance and variety of these sculptural riches, that the subject cannot be studied off-hand as a part of the architecture. And yet, it is a part of the architecture, literally. The temples of

Khajuraho belong to that stage of the development of religious art in India where sculpture and architecture are perfectly integrated. They are "masterpieces of architectural and sculptural art", and not of architecture alone. Actually, the monuments conform to what is called the "sculptural scheme" in which "sculpture ceases to be a superimposed decoration", but forms, instead, an integral part of the total work. Hindu art generally tends towards the ornamentation of shrines, for, as Fergusson puts it, "infinite labour bestowed on every detail was the mode in which the Hindu thought he could render his temple most worthy of the deity". Indeed it is almost a definition of the Hindu temple that it is "a monument, whose outer surface consists of sculptures". Only, at Khajuraho, the perfect sense of proportion, which is throughout evident, effectively integrates the architectural and the sculptural elements. If, at Khajuraho, "Fair temples, opening to the sight Surprise each turn with new delight", let us not forget that this is due as much to the charm and profusion of its sculpture as it is to the elegance and beauty of its architecture. This other treasure, the sculptural art of Khajuraho, creates a living universe of gods and goddesses, men and maidens, of gracious *apsaras* and graceful *gandharvs*, exquisite couples and intriguing *mithuns*, of animals both mythical and not so mythical, and of flowers and vegetation. It creates a whole world of beauty and life and love which, in its fulness and freshness, is rivalled in the whole wide world only at one place, Konark, and nowhere else.

# 6

# A World of Beauty

*Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,*
*Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,*
*Sylvan historian, who canst thus express*
*A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:*
*What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape*
*Of deities or mortals, or of both,*
*In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?*
*What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?*
*What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?*
*What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?*

ON A GRECIAN URN . JOHN KEATS

It has been stated in the preceeding chapter that the temples of Khajuraho belong to that stage in the development of religious art where architecture and sculpture are indivisible. Sculpture is no longer a superimposed decoration but an essential element woven, as it were, into the very texture of the fabric, and forms a most skilfully integrated part of an organic whole. It is true that these sculptures create a most beauteous effect and have much ornamental value, but this is a by-product, almost, and, in the context of their presence as required by religion, altogether immaterial. Again, from the architectural point of view, the outer figures add to the illusion of accentuation and verticality which the total design is calculated to create. Similarly the sculptural element within, things like bracket figures whether of *salbhanjikas* or of flying *devs*, or of the squat *gans*, serve practical needs. But these are minor considerations, and are not the reason for the existence of sculpture on the Hindu temple. The sculpture is there, especially the figure-sculpture, because there are elaborate injunctions in the *shastrs* which enjoin the placing of a variety of sculptured gods, goddesses, *rishis*, *munis*, *apsaras* and other denizens of heaven, animals

both mythical as well as real, and much more besides In the final analysis, they are all symbols, and have, each one of them, as definite a significance and import as the place and position assigned to each. Indeed, once we begin to understand the canonical prescription in the matter, all questions of propriety or lack of it, of beauty or of truth to nature, of the monstrous this and the mystical that, become pointless, and are relegated, as they rightly have to be, from the world of the image-maker and the niche-marker to the domain of the pundit and the priest. This is important, for the theory of Indian sculpture, as that of Indian art as a whole, is not to be understood and appreciated in any other terms except the religious. Whether the religious concepts are, as such, accepted by one or not, whether they are or are not to this man's liking or that man's comprehension, is an altogether different matter and has little relevance here. It is because the average modern mind anywhere, and the Western mind in particular, mixes up different views of art and canons of criticism with the Hindu view, that a great deal of confusion arises and much, at times gross and grossly unfair, misjudgement results. Luckily, the situation today is not so bad as it was a few decades ago when Indian art generally, and in that sculpture especially, had a bad time of it. It seems that the European critics and scholars had then entered into a conspiracy to compete with one another in condemning these as lacking in form, beauty, truth or any worthy feature whatsoever. This is no exaggeration. Here is Ruskin : "It is quite true that the art of India is delicate and refined. But it has one curious character distinguishing it from all other art of equal merit in design—it never represents a natural fact. It either forms its compositions out of meaningless fragments of colour and flowings of line; or, if it represents any living creature, it represents that creature under some distorted and monstrous form..."[1] Or Vincent Smith : "Indian sculpture properly so-called hardly deserves to be reckoned as art. The figures both of men and animals become stiff and formal, and the idea of power is clumsily expressed by the multiplication of members. The many-headed, many-armed gods and goddesses whose images crowd the walls and roofs of mediaeval temples have no pretensions to beauty, and are frequently hideous and grotesque."[2] And George Birdwood : "The monstrous shapes of the Puranic deities are unsuitable for the higher forms of artistic representation; and this is possibly why sculpture and painting are unknown as fine arts in India."[3] Evan Max Mueller, who praised India and her heritage to the skies, could write : "The idea of the Beautiful in Nature did not exist in the Hindu mind. It is the same with their descriptions of human beauty. They describe what they see, they praise certain features, they compare with other features of Nature, but the Beautiful *as such* does not exist for them. They never excelled either in Sculpture, or Painting...But it is strange nevertheless,—that the people as fond of the highest abstractions as the Hindus—should never have summarized their perception of the Beautiful."[4] It is amazing, indeed, how all these well-qualified and well-meaning men, and many more of this school of thought, failed to see our wondrous wealth in stone and marble, in bronze and terracotta, and on canvas and cave walls, of forms so beautiful that Beauty herself would blush before them ; or, seeing, failed to

find in them any summary of the Hindu's "perception of the Beautiful." But such is the unbelievable blindness even the best of eyes may suffer from. Of course, that phase, of such scathing and unmerited denunciation of Indian art, is now a thing almost forgotten, and, thanks to the efforts of a most brilliant array of sympathetic art critics, the pendulum has swung almost to the other extreme, of overpraise. Nevertheless, several sound and sober critics were to voice, in all honesty, their great admiration for Indian art—sculpture and painting in particular, since the latter had been more particularly denigrated. Fergusson, solid as few art critics have ever been, spoke out generously for Indian sculpture : "When Hindu Sculpture first dawns upon us in the rails of Bodh Gaya and Bharhut, B.C. 200 to 250, it is thoroughly original, absolutely without a trace of foreign influence, but quite capable of expressing its ideas, and of telling its story with a distinctness that never was surpassed, at least in India. Some animals, such as elephants, deer, and monkeys, are better represented there than in any Sculpture known in any part of the world ; so too are some trees and the architectural details are cut with an elegance and precision which are very admirable. The human figures, too, though very different from our standard of beauty and grace, are truthful to nature and where grouped together, combine to express the action intended with singular felicity. For an honest purpose like pre-Raphaelite kind of art, there is probably nothing much better to be found elsewhere."[5] Havell, one of the most vociferous of the champions of Indian art, was untiring in his efforts to put the Indian point of view across. For him it was "*prima facie* incredible that a highly developed civilisation, spreading over thousands of years and over a vast area like India, which has produced a splendid literature and expressed lofty ideas in building materials, should have lacked the capacity, or found no occasion, for giving them expression in sculpture and painting." He attributed the failure of the European mind to appreciate and understand Indian art to a different, even an unsatisfactory, approach to the matter. "European art," he wrote, "since the so-called Renaissance, has, as it were, its wings clipped : it knows only the beauty of earthly things. Indian art, soaring into the highest empyrean, is ever trying to bring down to earth something of the beauty of the things above."[6] As to understanding nature and appreciating beauty, it was not that the Indian artist did not know the one or care for the other. Only, there is, as Eric Gill puts it, "in all Indian Art a recognition of the fundamental principle that art has not for its *raison d'etre* the satisfaction of man's desire for material beauty in its surroundings. Such satisfaction is but by the way—though attained all the more inevitably in that it was not sought either as a means or as an end. It was, as it must always be, an accident.

"In all Indian Art there is a recognition of the fact that art is primarily Prophecy —that it is a translation into natural form of the inspiraion man receives from God. Indian Art like that of Mediaeval Europe or early Greece is essentially a religious art and as such is a true image of Indian civilization just as was the art of thirteenth century England and that of Greece in the sixteenth century before Christ."[7]

The European mind, saturated with Greek philosophy and art, has an under-

standable difficulty to take in what Sir John Woodroffe calls the "strangeness of intellectual landscape" of Indian art. "You feel that what you have seen does not belong to your world and that it is utterly and completely separated from you. It is not the tale of a 'glorified ideal of human powers' which Hellas has told in its animated marbles. It is a peep into the Indian Olympus peopled with actual gods and super-human beings, not with the athletes from the gymnasuims posing as deities."[8] Havell, too, has elaborated this point more that once : "The Greeks and the artists of the Renaissance who followed in their footsteps attempted to arrive at a scientific standard of beauty by a selection of what appeared to them most admirable in various types of humanity and in natural forms and appearances. Physical beauty attained by martial exercises was to the Greeks a divine characteristic ; the perfect human animal received divine honours both before and after death. The Indian artist had an entirely different starting-point. He considered that the perfect human animal was an inadequate symbol for the beauty of the divine nature which comprehended all human qualities and transcended them all. It was only by meditating on the Ultimate Perfection that the artist's mind could perceive some glimmer of the beauty of the Godhead.

"Mere bodily strength and mundane perfections of form are never glorified in Indian art. When the Indian artist models a representation of the Deity with an attenuated waist and suppresses all the smaller anatomical details so as to obtain an extreme simplicity of contour, the European draws a mental comparison with the ideas of Phidias or Michelangelo and declares that the Indian is sadly ignorant of anatomy and incapable of imitating the higher forms of nature.

"But the Indian artist in the best period of Indian sculpture and painting was no more ignorant of anatomy than Phidias or Praxiteles. He would create a higher and more etherealised type than a Grecian athlete or a Roman senator, and suggest that spiritual beauty which according to his philosophy can only be reached by the surrender of worldly attachments and the suppression of worldly desires.

"Indian art is essentially idealistic, mystic, symbolic, and transcendental. The artist is both priest and poet. In this respect Indian art is closely allied to the Gothic art of Europe—indeed, Gothic art is only the Eastern consciousness manifesting itself in a Western environment. But while the Christian art of the Middle Ages is always emotional, rendering literally the pain of the mortification of the flesh, the bodily sufferings of the Man of Sorrows, Indian art appeals more to the imagination and strives to realise the spirituality and abstraction of a supra-terrestrial sphere."[9]

This is not to say that the laws of beauty have been disregarded or strictest proportions ignored in the field of art or that of facts and figures of nature, whether human, animal, arboreal, floral, or of any other kind. The Indian artist knew his aesthetics as well as his mathematics, but for him the bases of art were not these but religion and metaphysics, and he believed, as his preceptors had taught him, in the reality of a super-reality, in the spirit of things and not merely their surface, in the *Purush* behind the veil, whose reflection all earthly beauty is. The plea for the defence has been summed up with passion and precision by Sri

Aurbindo : "The whole question of the Indian artistic treatment of the human figure has to be understood in the light of its aesthetic purpose. It works with a certain intention and ideal, a general norm and standard which permits of a good many variations and from which too there are appropriate departures". And then, taking up the oft-levied criticism that the Indian artist did not know the anatomy of the body well enough, or that India's artistic creatures were unnatural, he says, "It does not seem to me to matter much, since art is not anatomy, nor an artistic masterpiece necessarily a reproduction of physical fact or a lesson in natural science. I see no reason to regret the absence of telling studies in muscles, torsos, etc., for I cannot regard these things as having in themselves any essential artistic value. The one important point is that the Indian artist had a perfect idea of proportion and rhythm and used them in certain styles with nobility and power, in others like the Javan, the Gauda or the southern bronzes, with that or with a perfect grace added and often an intense and a lyrical sweetness. The dignity and beauty of the human figure in the best Indian statues cannot be excelled, but what was sought and what was achieved was not an outward naturalistic, but a spiritual and a psychic beauty, and to achieve it the sculptor suppressed, and was entirely right in suppressing, the obtrusive material detail and aimed instead at purity of outline and fineness of feature. And into that outline, into that purity and fineness he was able to work whatever he chose, mass of force or delicacy of grace, a static dignity or a mighty strength or a restrained violence of movement or whatever served or helped his meaning. A divine and subtle body was his ideal , and to a taste and imagination too blunt or realistic to conceive the truth and beauty of his idea, the ideal itself may well be a stumbling-block, a thing of offence. But the triumphs of art are not to be limited by the narrow prejudices of the natural realistic man ; that triumphs and endures which appeals to the best, *sadhu-sammatam;* that is deepest and greatest which satisfies the profoundest souls and the most sensitive psychic imaginations.

"Each manner of art has its own ideals, traditions, agreed conventions ; for the ideals and forms of the creative spirit are many, though there is one ultimate basis.

"The essence of the question lies in the rendering of the truth and beauty seized by the spirit. Indian sculpture, Indian art in general, follows its own ideal and traditions and these are unique in their character and quality. It is the expression, great as a whole through many centuries and ages of creation, supreme at its best, whether in rare early pre-Asokan, in Asokan or later work of the first heroic age or in the magnificent statues of the cave-cathedrals and Pallava and other southern temples or the noble, accomplished or gracious imaginations of Bengal, Nepal and Java through the after centuries or in the singular skill and delicacy of the bronze work of the southern religions, a self-expression of the spirit and ideals of a great nation and a great culture which stands apart in the cast of its mind and qualities among the earth's peoples, famed for its spiritual achievement, its deep philosophies and its religious spirit, its artistic taste, the richness of its poetic imagination, and not inferior once in its dealings with life and its social endeavour and political institutions. This sculpture is a singularly powerful, a seizing and profound interpretation in stone and

bronze of the inner soul of that people."[10]

The point of all this is that for those who bring to bear upon it the right sympathy and understanding, the Indian artist's norm is "perfectly sensible, beautiful and aesthetic". Beautiful, too; for let us not think that beauty, as the world generally believes, is not a fundamental element of the Hindu view of art, and that the creations, whenever they are intended to be such, are not perfectly beautiful. Indeed, as critic after discerning critic has freely admitted, India has contributed some of the finest studies—whole types and not just a few stray specimens—to the galaxy of the ideals of beauty, both male and female, human and animal, and natural and supernatural.

A sculpture which—to name but a few jewels out of its vast treasures—possesses the Kailash at Ellora and the Sun-temple at Konark, which owns the Buddha of Sarnath in stone and the Natraj of Tanjore in bronze ; which lays claim to animal studies like the Ashokan lions and the monkeys at Mahabalipuram ; which has, in floral designs, the railings of Bharhut and the pendants of Abu, which offers to the lovers of the female figure the *vrikshika* of Sanchi, the *yakshini* of Mathura, the Rukmini of Nokhas and all those alluring *apsaras* of Khajuraho—surely, such a sculpture cannot be regarded as lacking in the sense of beauty and the knowledge of anatomy except by those who are extremely ignorant or excessively prejudiced.

We have dwelt on these essentials of Indian sculpture at some length, for the Hindu temple is a "monument whose outer surface consists of sculptures". Actually, this is a later development, and Stella Kramrisch's admirable cliche is not applicable to all specimens of temple architecture, but covers, rather, the mediaeval phase, from the eighth century onwards and thereafter. At any rate, the temples at Khajuraho are profusely sculptured so that the visitor will come across all those "monstrous", "unnatural", "strangely distorted", and "obviously disproportionate" figures which some of the critics quoted have been talking about. Khajuraho has, of course, less of these, even as the North, in general, has ; for it is the South, which untouched by the Greek and the Gandhar impress—supposedly so evident in respect of the North Indian sculpture—stuck tenaciously to its own ideals of art and concepts of beauty. Also, Khajuraho is, as we shall see later, decadent, not classical, and is hence nearer the reach and understanding of the moderns. All the same, it is part of, and in line with, an unbroken tradition and therefore subscribes, in all respects, to the principles and canons and the general attitude and approach of Hindu sculptural art.

But even if the Hindu temple were not so lavishly carved and decorated as it usually is and as it has been required to be for over a millennium now, sculpture would still have a lot to do with it. We have observed, in an earlier chapter, that the Hindu temple is essentially the cella and all later developments, howsoever admirably supported by myths and explained by meanings, are but an attempt to impart a sort of monumental dignity to the place of worship. And even though it is true that "infinite labour bestowed on every detail was the mode in which he (the Hindu) thought he could render his temple most worthy of the deity", and

therefore conceived and worked out all these elaborate schemes of sculptural decoration which covers the outer surface or even, as in the case of Khajuraho's temples, the interior, all this is only as relevant to the matter of worship as his setting up an entire institution of the *devdasis* who might dance before the deity ! The central fact of the Hindu mode of worship is the homage and offering and supplication of the individual worshipper to, or his communion with, his god, whose symbol or image is enshrined in the cella. Thus, the design of the temple is correlated chiefly to the externals ; the cella is left severely plain with nothing to distract the worshipper in his contemplation of the image. What matters therefore is the icon. First and foremost, and in the final analysis, what counts is the idol : all else is vanity. That is why the sculptor is, in the first instance, the maker of images, the shaper of gods, and naturally, cannot be just anybody. He is a priest—or used to be, in the initial stages of the setting up of deities—and must be pure and holy, devout and disciplined. We have already seen that this was generally true of all artists, that they had to be like *yogis*, holy and highly disciplined. But in the case of the sculptor, who had to be one with the divine before the divine could be realized and given a form, the emphasis on his being worthy of his calling increased tenfold. For him, verily, there had to be an act of *dhyan*, meditation, and of *yog*, union, an identification of the empirical self with the divine, before the process of technical rendering of the realized could start. What is more, the Hindu belief in, and worship of, images has never meant that the Hindus thought of God as a limited, finite intelligence of this form or that. On the contrary, and his thirty-three crores of deities notwithstanding, almost every Hindu would, in this matter, voice the feeling and take the stand of Shankaracharya: "O Lord, pardon me...(that) I have by contemplation clothed thee with a shape who art shapeless". Indeed, idols are but aids for the simpler minds to grasp the idea, and to reach the formless through form. This is now generally understood and even the Westerner has stopped scoffing at the Hindu for his images and idols. As one European writer says : "And yet under all the deities which are so worshipped in India there is not one Hindu from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas who would not scout the idea of there being more gods than one, and that one unknowable, Mysterious, Absolute Holiness. The rest are but ideas, formed by man in the vain efforts to bring the Incomprehensible into comprehension."[11] Unknowable, Mysterious, Incomprehensible, Absolute Holiness ! The maker of images knew this. His problem was to give shape to a vision of this Infinite Abstraction, this Essence, this Eternity, this God, Indefinable and Indescribable, whom only a God could comprehend. And the vision had to be merited, through self-purification, through penance, through meditation, through *yog*, through devotion, through surrender, through tireless training. This, certainly, was no merry whistling through a job of plastic moulding.

Through contemplation and worship, in dream and prayer, must the artist receive the vision before the work could begin. This is, indeed, the case with all true artists. "The artist", says Croce, "never makes a stroke with his brush without having previously seen it with his imagination."[12] Or, as Jacques Maritain puts it,

"The work of art has been kneaded and prepared, formed, brooded over, and matured in a mind before emerging into matter."[13] For the Hindu artist, a strict ritual of penance and prayer was drawn up and prescribed. Several Tantric works define and describe the theory and practice in this matter. One picture of this is given in a Buddhist Tantr from which the following account has been summarised: "The artist is enjoined to proceed to a solitary place after purificatory ablutions and wearing newly washed garments. There he is to perform the sevenfold office, beginning with the invocation of the hosts of the Buddhas and Boddhisatvas in an open space before him, and the offerings of the real or imaginary flowers, and ending with a dedication of the merit acquired to the welfare of all beings. Then he has to realise in thought the four infinite qualities (love, compassion, sympathy, same-sightedness). Then he must meditate on the original purity of the first principle of things, and on what comes to the same thing, their emptiness or absolute non-existence. By the fire of the idea of emptiness there are destroyed beyond discovery the five elements which compose the individual consciousness. Only when the personality of the individual is thus set aside is he able to invoke the Deity, which last condition is strictly enjoined. For complete comprehension is only possible when the consciousness is thus indentified with an object of cognition. All this takes place in the imagination. The Divinity appears 'like a reflection', or 'as in a dream'. Very rarely, indeed, is any drawing made use of, even in the most complicated conceptions, where the principal personage to be represented is surrounded in the centre of a *mandala* (shrine). It is only when the mental image is thus defined that the artist begins to mould or paint."[14]

Keeping in view the injunctions of the *Shastrs*, Mulk Raj Anand describes the process which the actual making of an image by the Hindu artist would involve, thus : "The artist performs purificatory ablutions and sits down to focus his attention on such a *dhyana-mantra* (mental picture) of the Supreme Being as signifies His Cosmic Rhythm in the Dance of Siva :

*"The dancing foot, the sound of tinkling bells,*
*The songs that are sung, and the various steps,*
*The forms assumed by the Lord as he dances,*
*Discover these in your hearts, so shall your bonds be broken.*

"He then offers flowers, incense, and other gifts to the form conceived. The mental picture is thus seen in all its details and the work of art is complete in the mind before being translated into form. The artist then begins the task of technical elaboration, during which time he must hold fast to the conception evolved through *Yoga* (contemplation), and strain every nerve to translate it perfectly into form."[15]

It is important to fully appreciate and understand the Hindu stand in this respect, if confusion and error in arriving at a correct judgement of Hindu sculpture are to be avoided. Viewed thus, it is obvious that the Hindu image is not a matter of the artist's arbitrary rendering of his own concept, but a vision of the nature of things bestowed upon a devout mind by an invoked and pleased deity. The artist becomes but a means, an instrument of expression, and puts forth that which he

has received and which he needs must put forth faithfully. This disposes of all questions of distorted beauty and apparent ugliness, of monstrosity and oddness, of disproportion and absurdity which some critics and judges have raised with regard to Indian sculpture. In addition, there is such strict and rigid prescription in the manuals of art as to measurements—accurate to hairbreadths—that there is no scope whatever for deviations and personal idiosyncrasies or interpretations. That is why there is at times such sameliness of form in the fashioning of images, especially the cult-images, through centuries upon centuries of Hindu sculptural art. Indian iconometry, working on a system of *talman* admits of several types which may at times vary from region to region but, within the framework, the rules are exacting and the artist would not think of going against them. That would be sacrilegious. Since the system is based on a sense of the perfect proportions of the human body, the artist has been generally content to accept the canons.

This is a significant point. No artist, no worker worth the name in any field, goes about wasting his energy on defying conventons or decrying traditions for the fun of it. The law-books, the *shastric* canons, require of the artist that certain norms and ideals be subscribed to ; that he should work within a certain, seemingly rigid, framework. But within the so-called limitations prescribed by religion, there was, has always been, and still is, an astonishingly wide scope for variations upon any theme. What else does an artist want to do after all? To define is to limit—so it is said. And yet discipline is not limitation ; and, in any case, each artist has always got to work within limitations of some kind or the other, whether of the material he uses, or the tools and instruments, or the prevailing notions and current values of the society in which he lives. No Indian musician has ever complained that he has not been able to create melody which he wanted because he had to work within the range and scope of the *sargam*. Indeed, no Indian artist has ever had cause to rue or question the limitations, if limitations they can be called, of the conventions and traditions of his art. The Indian sculptor, certainly, has been able to produce a magnificent array of works, be they little bronzes and minutely chiselled midgets in stone, or a whole temple like the Kailash at Ellora carved out of solid rock. The 5000-year old tradition of Indian sculpture provides example after amazing example of a strange amalgam of the conventional and the new ; so that the stream of achievement in this sphere is one of living waters, and one can see distinct and definite development at every stage along the line. What is more, and the ravages of time notwithtanding, there are such vast quantities of sculpted wealth scattered all over the land, and so rich is the variety thereof, that it is difficult to draw any conclusions acceptable to all as to the fundamentals, whether of values or of technique, which inform and govern this great, really great, artistic heritage of India. Since the stylish and graceful sculpture of the temples of Khajuraho comes at the end of nearly 3500 years of the Indian artist's work in this field, it is necessary to have a fleeting look at the golden heritage bequeathed to the Chandel sculptor, an heritage to which he, in turn, made such a glorious contribution.

The earliest evidence of Indian sculpture which we possess is provided by the

excavated remains of the Indus Valley civilization. The extant specimens—which belong, in a way, to the treasury of world sculpture since they are among the first fine traces of real artistic worth—are, surprisingly enough, fairly mature work. This of course means that these discovered remnants of the Indus Valley civilization themselves pertain to a later and maturer stage of that civilization. But be that as it may, what is today available is certainly art of no mean merit. The pieces commonly known as the Bearded Man and the Dancing Girl or, as some critics would like to label them, a priest and a *devdasi*, are exceptionally good examples of the level of achievement of that age. The first is a red sandstone statuette found at Harappa which represents, in the words of John Irwin, " the naked torso of a man posed frontally, with shoulders well back and abdomen slightly prominent. The modelling, naturalistic in style, is extraordinarily exact in anatomical detail and shows a sense of volume characteristic of mature sculpture, the surface undulations and the supple flesh being rendered with great plastic subtlety. A surprising feature of technique is that head and arms (now missing) were cut separately and socketed into the torso. Breast nipples, too, were made independently, cement being used to fix them."[16] Another critic, J.P. Guha, accords it equally high praise : "Among the few sculptures of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro that we can see today the most noteworthy is the broken male torso in red sandstone. Though represented frontally, this Harappa torso is conceived in three dimensions. Realism of a very high order makes this piece a work of beauty, but this realism makes no attempt at a representational literalness of human anatomy. On the contrary, the aesthetic design has envisaged a certain pattern of curved masses suggestive of 'the essential image.' The subtle curves of the back, the rather heavy abdomen, and the peculiar indentations on the shoulders are all conceived in one sweeping nervous and sensitive line, rhythmical in a surprisingly sophisticated manner."[17]

The other find, excavated from a different site, Mohenjodaro, is a bronze figurine, a little above four inches in height. This exceptionally alive statuette of a dancing girl is of great interest and value. Apart from being an example of the process known as *cire-perdue* or wax-lost casting, it is the prototype of the sensuous female in Indian sculpture—of one celebrated variety, at least. With legs and arms rather disproportionately elongated, and a hand resting on the hip, in a most coquettish gesture this figurante of a bygone culture became the model which, passing through scores of centuries of recasting and refashioning, was to emerge as one of the two distinct categories of the Indian ideals of feminine beauty. The second category of these ideals, the heavy-hipped, full-breasted, repose-exuding, light-scattering, delight-promising woman, has its beginnings also in the same age. We refer to the terracotta effigy of the so-called Mother-goddess, excavated from the sites mentioned above. To quote K.M. Munshi, "we find...in the semi-nude Mother-Goddess, with heavy bust, thin waist and rounded hips, dressed in elaborate head-dress, *mekhala*, or the girdle and ornaments like *chhanavira*, the characteristics which we see in many of the female figures in all succeeding centuries."[18] Finally, there are the numerous steatite seals of human as well as animal figures which, again, are of immense worth and

value from many points of view. They, too, reveal the same advanced state of methods and techniques as the specimens already spoken of and supply further evidence that the Indus Valley civilization shows, in the words of Stuart Piggott, "the scrupulous adherence to the unchanging traditions of the temple rather than the secular instability of the court."[19] The much-talked-of seals depicting Pashupati,—the horned deity seated in the well known *yog* posture and surrounded by wild beasts—is generally accepted, after Sir John Marshal's opinion, to be the earliest known form of the god Shiv, so that these seals of Harappa and Mohenjodaro become the prototype of those icons and images of the great god, Shiv which have since then, and throughout the several thousand years of the subsequent story of Indian sculpture, found a place in our innumerable *shivalaiyas*. So, there they are : the god, the Mother-goddess, the priest, and the *devdasi*. Of the temple dancer, the same impudent and provocative figurine in bronze, one is tempted to quote this much more in praise : "Executed in bronze...this figure of a young girl in a 'half-impudent posture' shows deft artistic handling and a high degree of sophistication. The true significance of the figurine is not known. It has been argued that the young girl is a representative of a temple dancer, an institution not more antiquated than the mediaeval Hindu temple. Whether the figure represents a temple dancer or a social entertainer is of little significance; for us it is a work of art. The figure is a nude except for one arm which is clothed in a series of bangles. According to Stuart Piggott, her ornaments and complicated coiffure suggest 'a sophisticated version of the female type known in the rough, schematized pottery figurines in the Kulli culture.' With her right fist resting on the tilted hip, and the other arm hanging free to hold a bowl, this statuette is a triumph of details in linear terms. The dancing line suggests more than it states. The artist has relied more on his intuitive perception of the image than on verisimilitude to nature."[20]

To revert, the spiritual and the sensuous, the two main threads of the Indian sculptural tradition, are already there. The exceptionally fine miniature engravings of animals on the scenes, especially those which depict the bulls, show, in addition, the great plastic skill already achieved by the artists of 5000 years ago, providing thus yet another very important feature of Indian sculpture. Add but the floral designs, and almost the total range of subsequent sculptural development is already to hand. What is more, these are no rude and crude beginnings but work of a high level and praiseworthy mastery. The tradition is handed on thus to those who follow, at the take-off stage, so to put it.

The attainments of the Indus Valley civilization in this respect are very ably summed up by Saraswati thus : "Among the achievements of the Harappa civilisation may be mentioned a plastic art that concerned itself largely with the representation of forms in relief as well as in the round. The materials are terracotta, stone and bronze, and in the latter two the achievements are found to be of a developed and stylised order, far ahead of the tradition presented by the terracotta figurines. The contrast presented by the two traditions—one in terracotta and the other in stone and bronze—offers a rather perplexing problem in view of the apparent contem-

poraneity of the objects. It is possible that the former represents a popular plastic idiom of the commoner people, perhaps following the terracotta tradition of the peasant cultures of Kulli and Zhob, while the stone and bronze sculptures represent an art of the higher section of the people, already sophisticated because of their elevated position in the society. The distinction in the art idioms was, in all probability, due to class distinctions which appear to have emerged as a result of the predominant commercial economy that provided the mainstay of this civilisation." And further : "Plastic art in India, so far as extant remains go, begins with the peasant cultures of Kulli and Zhob and attains a maturity in the urban Harappa culture, where the activity is found to be more extensive and varied. In spite of different kinds of feelings and expressions, the Harappa art may be said to have already established a conception of art form, the fundamentals of which persist through the entire range of Indian sculpture. The trends and tendencies, already established, outlasted the struggles of many novel civilisations and remained active as long as Indian sculpture itself. It has been rightly said hence that the plastic art of the Indus civilisation contains an accumulated store of the tradition ; but there it did not come to an end. As the subsequent phases would show, it persisted further and underlay Indian sculpture as long as it remained creative."[21]

The temple tradition of art ; and stone, bronze and terracotta ; techniques already perfected—all that was there such a long time ago. What happened between that time and the period around 300 B.C. when we come across the next available evidence, the next known phase of India's sculptural development, remains a mystery. There are conjectures of various kinds. The Aryans worshipped the elements, and sacrificed to the god of fire. The ritual consisted of *hom* and *ahuti* so that icons and images, or the temple and temple decorations, were hardly needed. Another guess is that some catastrophe, some calamity, has for all time removed all traces and signs of a whole chunk of the tradition of India's sculpture. Whatever be the cause, the next link in the chain of development is met with only in Mauryan times, less than 2500 years ago.

This new phase of the story of Indian sculpture begins with the construction of the celebrated Ashokan columns which were carved out of grey sandstone from Chunar, near Varanasi. Emperor Ashok, under whom the Mauryan Empire reached its zenith, had adopted Buddhism as his own faith and all but proclaimed it as the state religion. The remains of the Mauryan sculpture are mainly of the reign of Ashok and, therefore, pertain to Buddhism. The Ashokan pillars were used for proclaiming and preaching the edicts of the emperor propagating the Law of Piety. It is believed that quite a number of these were put up though today very few exist, and these also in varying states of preservation. Generally, these Ashokan columns were about thirty to forty feet high, all monoliths, crowned usually with impressive capitals consisting of lions, bulls or elephants. These columns were polished with material and through technique such as gave them a most lustrous look. The polish and its lustre have stayed undimmed through all these long centuries. The animal figures which are placed on top of the columns are exceptionally fine

representations of the sculptural art of the Mauryans. All the distinctive features of the Mauryan art may be seen to the best advantage in the Sarnath column. Once this pillar stood in the Deer Park where the Buddh delivered his first sermon. Of this structure, Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese scholar-traveller, wrote : "A stone pillar about seventy feet high. The stone is altogether as bright as jade. It is glistening and sparkles like light ; and all those who pray fervently before it see from time to time, according to their petitions, figures with good or bad signs. It was here that Tathagata, having arrived at enlightenment, began to turn the wheel of the law."[22] The fragments of this column, the capital and parts of a gigantic wheel, are now housed in the museum at Sarnath. As is well known, the present state emblem of India is a replica of the quadripartite lion-capital of this very pillar. Of this capital, Sir John Marshal says: "The Sarnath capital...though by no means a masterpiece, is the product of the most developed art of which the world was cognizant in the third century B.C.—the handiwork of one who had generations of artistic effort and experience behind him. In the masterful strength of the crowning lions, with their swelling veins and tense muscular development, and in the spirited realism of the reliefs below, there is no trace whatever of the limitations of primitive art."[23] In addition to these great lions, there were other masterpieces produced by the Mauryan artists in the field of animal sculpture. Special mention may be made of the Rampurva bull, and the Dhauli elephant. Along with these animal studies of the Mauryan times and the pillar structures, some human figure sculpture was also attempted. Of the several pieces now ascribed to this period, the most noteworthy is the Didarganj *yakshi* now in the Patna Museum. Linked closely to the type represented by the Mother-goddess of the Indus Valley civilization, this figure, carved wholly in the round so that it can be seen from all sides, represents great technical advance. About this piece Guha says : "The figure, 5 feet 3 inches high, carries a fly-whisk which passing over the right shoulder trails on to the ground. The chief features of this figure are its full and ample breasts, attenuated waist, and broad hips which represent the ideal of feminine beauty in India. The upper part of the figure is nude, while the lower part is covered by a thin drapery. The complicated hair-do, fine ornaments, and the graceful stance, all point to a typical girl of the *beau monde* of the Maurya period. Though sophisticated and fairly refined as a piece of sculpture, the Didarganj Yakshi is not altogether free from a certain stiffness which attends the statues of the series. Fluid linear movement has been exploited to the full in the modelling of the abdomen, chin, and eyes, and thus a roundness has been achieved ; in the lower half, on the other hand, lushness in the treatment of the drapery notwithstanding, the thighs and feet seem to be lacking in rhythm, thus presenting a contrast to the lyricism of the torso."[24]

With this *yakshi* and other similar figures of the *yakshs*, belonging to the same period, the Indian art tradition appears to have found itself once again. We say this because the pillars and the sculpted capitals of Ashok represent an art which somehow is not indigenous. There is evidence of a great deal of foreign influence and, though we see the Indian spirit in the bulls and elephants, the

techniques employed and items like "the bell-shaped capitals and the friezes of honey-suckle, rosette, and palmette etc. suggest Hellenistic and Achaemenid origin."[25] With the *yaksh* and *yakshini* sculptures collected from various places, however, we catch up with the line of development natural to the soil. What is more, in contrast with the lofty, *digvijai*-flaunting columns of Ashok, these figures are solid and earthy, marking as it were the return from Buddh's renunciation to the emphasis on prosperity and material-mindedness of the people. As Coomaraswamy puts it, "...resting their immense weight firmly on the earth, (they) are immediate and affirmative expressions of physical energy. Life is accepted without question or analysis ; the solid flesh is not idealized."[26] In this, these sculptures become at once the forerunners of the great ures, figural as well as floral, of places like Bharhut, Bodh Gaya, Sanchi and Mathura.

The places mentioned above are great names in the sphere of Indian sculpture. The work associated with these sites is usually grouped under one label : Early Classical. At one time, the Buddhist, who had shunned worldly pleasures and condemned the arts of music and dancing and forbidden the painting of pictures on the walls of monasteries, could say : "Beauty is nothing to me, neither the beauty of the body nor that which comes of dress.. Form, sound, taste, smell, touch, these intoxicate human beings : cut off the yearning inherent in them."[27] Now a new spirit was manifesting itself. Buddhist in name, it was closely allied to the life and faith of the common people to whom Buddhism had flung open its doors. This reversal of the ideals of the Buddh, and the artistic achievements which resulted therefrom, are ably summed up by Irwin. "In opening its ranks to the non-Aryan sections of the population, the Buddhist movement prepared the way for a release of popular forces which were eventually to transform its original character as a monastic order to that of a popular religion with a cult, incorporating the beliefs, practices and modes of worship characteristic of the traditional cults of the soil. In this way, the worship of trees, snakes and *stupas* (originally primitive tumuli or burial-mounds) and numerous other non-Aryan cults, became characteristic features of popular Buddhist worship, and at the same time a Buddhist pantheon arose peopled by *Yakshas, Yakshinis, Nagas* and other *devatas*, the godlings and fertility spirits of village India.

"Equally significant were the philosophic implications. While Buddhism, in proclaiming the equality of man, expressed a new humanism and a strong faith in the brotherhood of man, at the same time its gospel of reincarnation stressed the unity of all life and the identification of man with nature. From this arose the intense feeling for nature and animal life which we find displayed in the Bharhut and Sanchi reliefs, where animals as well as human beings bring flowers and other offerings in homage to the symbol of the Buddha ; in the processions headed by gaily caparisoned elephants and horses ; in the ponds teeming with lotuses, water-fowl and fish, with here and there a buffalo cooling itself in the water. The treatment everywhere is full of sympathy, kinship and affection, and the theme unique, for its period, in the history of art.

"There is nothing hieratic in this art, nor is there anything spiritual. Fruit,

flowers and foliage, as well as men and beasts, are rendered with an acute delight in their mundane existence, reflecting an attitude to life in which any dualism between spirit and matter, or between the mystic and the sensuous, is inconceivable."[28]

All this is true of the three places—Bharhut, Sanchi and Bodh Gaya—as well as of the early rock-cut *chaityas* of Bhaja in the Western Ghats. While these last were the forerunners of the great monumental rock-cut sanctuaries of Ajanta and Ellora, the railings of Bharhut, Sanchi and Bodh Gaya or the great gateways, or a sculpted figure like that of the '*yakshini* at Sanchi, are all carvings of high artistic merit. Indicating a steady all-round development, in techniques and themes, in spirit and sensuousness, they pave the way for the emergence of the work known as India's classical sculpture which marks the high-water mark of the country's achievement in this field.

But before we consider the excellences of the Golden Age of Indian art, under the Gupts, let us cast a glance at one particular centre of prolific sculptural activity which belongs to both the pre-Gupt and the Gupt eras and which serves as the true link between the Early Classical and the Classical : Mathura. The specimens unearthed from this site indicate that Mathura came into prominence after the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire when, once again, the foreign invader and marauder put in his appearance on Indian soil. S.K. Sarswati draws a graphic picture of how Mathura became a flourishing centre of art. "With the disruption of the Maurya Empire north-western part of India was again a prey to foreign aggressions. The Greeks, the Sakas, the Pahlavas, the Kushanas, etc. entered India, and there began a scramble for power the details of which are rather tiresome and not unoften free from confusion. Some of these peoples advanced far into the interior, but in spite of these constant upheavals, old Indian art continued to enjoy an unbroken continuity (along the direction already outlined)..There was no break or disturbance and, except for certain minor details of ornament and presentation, plastic art developed in the Gangetic valley along the lines already determined in the early classical phase. Mathura, the converging point of ancient trade routes from all directions, was not only an important and prosperous city in the ancient days, but it also grew up to be a prolific centre of artistic activity where the history of Indian sculpture can be studied in unbroken sequence from rather early times right up to the mediaeval period. The fame and prestige of this great centre of art spread far and sculptures of Mathura style and workmanship have been found in widely distant regions. For the history of Indian art few sites of India are of greater interest and importance than Mathura."[29]

Mathura enjoyed a long period of sustained art activity, so that at one end, in the early phase, the work produced belongs to the same class and quality as that of Bharhut, Sanchi and Bodh Gaya ; at the other end, of maturity and perfection, some of Mathura art ranks almost with that of the Classical Age. It is not possible in this brief and rapid survey of Indian sculpture to do full justice to the contribution made by the artists of Mathura. They enlarged the scope and range of the chisel and the mallet to such an extent that nearly all that was ever to follow in the

realm of Indian sculpture was attempted by them, and they all but perfected it. Influenced obviously by what is commonly known as the Gandhar school, the work of the Mathura artists displays new elements and new skills. Of the total achievement, four distinct points might be made. First, there is the great Buddh-icon, *a la* Gandhar or not, but now associated definitely with Mathura. It is true that the Mathura Buddh is mundane rather than spiritual and lacks the serenity and perfection, in other respects, of the later carvings of the Gupt Age. None the less it is to the artists of Mathura that we owe the first Indian representation of the Master. Secondly, there is that well-known image of royalty, the headless statue of "The great King, the King of Kings, His Majesty Kanishka", which is probably India's first portrait in stone. Standing with legs apart, holding a sword in one hand, wearing a long coat, and shod in impressive-looking boots, this is one of the few extant statues anywhere which instantly remind one of Shelley's *Ozymandias* and the vanity of temporal power.

Then, there are the fetching and full-bloomed *yakshinis* of Mathura. The loose loves of Konark and Khajuraho are still far off, but the sensuous is moving already towards the sensual, and some of the figures are, without doubt, on the doubtful side. About these nymphs of Mathura, one critic has this to say : "Mathura has yielded many a fine image of *yakshis*. These alto-relievo sculptures, gathered from the sites in and around Mathura, were perhaps part of the railings of the Jain *stupas*. But affiliation to the Jain faith has left no mark on the treatment of the *yakshis*. They belong to the same tradition as those of Bharhut, Bodhgaya, Sanchi, and look back to the Mohenjo-daro dancing girl. They have the same attenuated waist, bulbous hips, and round fleshy breasts. In point of execution, however, the *yakshis* of Mathura show an advance. The development is toward nimbler movement and greater poise. The expression is more urban, more sophisticated. The point may be illustrated by a reference to two lively figures of *yakshis* in the railing pillars from Bhutesvara, now in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The *yakshis* are seen standing on crouching dwarfish figures. Above the head of each *yakshi*, on the projecting balcony, may be seen a few figures. The maiden in the left hand pillar clasps a bunch of grapes in her right hand, while the same hand rests on the girdle of the first maiden. The figures are seminude, and the sculptor has made full use of his technique to emphasize the erotic appeal by the coquettish tilt of the head, and a suggestion of abandon in the entire body."[80] This gets us on to the fourth distinctive feature we wished to notice, and which is represented *par excellence* by the graceful group called 'a Bacchanalian scene,' now in the Calcutta Museum. There are many such groups of Mathura sculptures dealing with the theme of drinking. Wine and woman, pleasure and, perhaps, even a kind of calm that cometh from the play of passion—these are introduced now into the tradition of Indian sculpture. And they are there to stay, and grow, and undergo much beautiful modelling in art, and much speculative treatment in religion and philosophy.

While the workmen of Mathura plied their tools, their brother craftsmen in other parts of the country, to the north in Gandhar and to the south in Andhr, were

using the same with equally impressive results. In the South especially, the art at Amaravati reached a level of excellence and elegence which draws, and draws deservedly, the tribute that Amaravati art is "the most voluptuous and the most delicate flower of Indian sculpture."[31] Depicting ostentatiously Buddhist legends in minute detail, the art of Amaravati indicates rather how, in the words of Bachhofer, "religion is being used as a pretext for the purpose of singing a wildly enthusiastic, rapturous paean of wordly life."[32] Indeed, the phrase might as well be used about what later generations of artists were to put up at Khajuraho ! Actually, between the work at Mathura and that at Amaravati, the complete gamut of the spiritual, the sensuous and the sensual is provided to the sculptor, except that the erotic poses have yet not been attempted. Otherwise the comparatively more mundane and the more lewd of Mathura is added to by the comparatively more innocent and the more vivid work at Amaravati. Over this latter, the art of Amaravati, Saraswati waxes eloquent :

"The ideal of disciplined life or of worldly renunciation is nowhere in evidence. Rather, it is the elegant and exuberant life of this world which the artist aims to depict. He confines his themes to the doings of a mundane court and society—themes that would lend a human appeal to his works. In delineating such themes he does not hesitate even to go beyond the liturgical convention. The real tenor of the legend is concealed by a description of court life or of the joys of worldly existence. And what a rich description it is ! Every scene teems with youthful forms of aristocratic build in all possible attitudes and bends. The tall, slender and attenuated forms jostle one another. The smooth and resilient flesh, seemingly pleasurable to the touch, lends a sensuous effect to the figures. This is more so with regard to the delicate and alluring female forms with their full busts, heavy hips, coquettish countenances and almost serpentine suppleness ..There is no doubt that this art is sensuous, and even frankly so. But compared to the unabashed lewdness of Mathura the sensuousness of Amaravati seems to be more refined and more restrained. Amaravati art is, no doubt, saturated with a naive paganism. But it is the innocent delight and joyous freshness which the artist aims at in his female forms of Botticellian elegance. What the artist tries to express is the love of life and the joys of existence. The stories and the legends that he depicts are transformed, hence, into 'intensified instances of life' in its fullest enjoyment and experience. Here we have the wildest transports of joy alternating with outbursts of violent passion. Everything is dramatic, mobile and agitated. A nervously irritated disposition seems to have taken hold of man. Bachhofer rightly observed : 'A passionate sense for everything terrestrial manifests itself, as if Indian art had taken leave of this world with a tumultuous feast, before deliberately entering the cold fields of spirituality'."[33]

The Amaravati sculpture is in line with the tradition of work at Bharhut, Sanchi and Bodh Gaya, and marks the end of an epoch, the epoch preceding India's classical period in the age of the Gupts. During this period which terminates with the work of the artists of Andhr, much was achieved and in many sectors of the sphere of Indian sculpture. K.M. Munshi sums up all this excellently : "The Andhra

School had little concern with renunciation, ethics or Yoga. Its creations were dominated by the joy of life. Frankly sensuous, almost bursting with dynamism, the human figure represents its most brilliant phase. The figures of the women display lovely and passionate poses ; their gait is rhythmic ; their bodies sway in grace." Consequently the situation *vis-a-vis* Indian sculpture at this stage of its development was as follows : "Sculpture was now as wide and varied as life itself weaving men and women, trees and animals into one collective existence. At Bodh-Gaya stolidity gave place to swaying, graceful movement. At Sanchi gaiety and vivacity were added to the swinging movements, to express the joy of life. The art at Karle attained strength and dignity portraying men and women with their feet firmly planted on earth. More than even those of Sanchi, the reliefs of Mathura express the sheer joy of life. There is an all-pervading serenity or cheerfulness and the sculptured ladies make love or display their charms with frank innocence. At Amaravati they are coquettish ; ecstatic joy and wild passion have taken possession of them. There is very little of other-worldliness in these sculptures. Voluptuousness and passion are as important as grace and spiritual calm. Thus did Indian art attain mastery in the technique of expressing the subtle, violent or serene moods of men and women, and not merely in figure and face, but in symbolic movements expressed through the shaded curves of the stone."[34]

Let us pause a little and breathe a while for that which lies ahead will leave us breathless. India is entering that phase of her story which is known as her Golden Age, the reign of the Gupts. By the time the rule of the Gupts was established, in the fourth century A.D., Buddhism and Jainism had undergone such a change that in several respects the two faiths were getting approximated with Hinduism. This itself was no longer the Vedic religion of pre-Buddhist times, but had assimilated many new elements. It had also borrowed a great deal from the other two which had at one time originated as protests against the people's main current of religious belief. Much was taken from Buddhist thought and philosophy; and from the Jain that emphasis on *ahimsa*, non-violence, which even today constitutes such an important strain of the Hindu religious sentiment that a Hindu—Gandhi—became the apostle of non-violence, of this age. In many a matter now the three faiths were like three gentle sisters, affectionate and indulgent, rather than jealousy-ridden co-wives scheming for supremacy in the husband's heart and household. Psychologically, this meant release from much tension ; and it saved one from frittering away energy and attention on petty and pointless pursuits. As a result, the people's efforts and talents were rightly directed and fruitfully employed. All this brought about such wonderful achievements that there was hardly a sphere of human existence where for the next few centuries the high-water mark of excellence was not attained and sustained. There was peace in the country, and wealth in plenty, and the people were happy and prosperous. From joy and freedom cometh the best men can produce, and so everything flourished. That is why the period is known universally as the Golden Age of Indian art and culture, and it is to this age that the truly classical creations in the realm of art and literature belong.

In sculpture the Gupt style had sprouted almost directly from the Mathura and Amaravati schools—with one significant point of departure and development. A new element of refinement and sensitiveness was introduced into the plastic tradition, so that the popular idiom was translated into the classical. This distinction is most easily discernible if one compares any Mathura Buddh with a classical sculpture of the same subject like, for example, the celebrated Buddh of Sarnath turning the Wheel of the Law. One glance at the latter suffices to indicate that a new and truly great aesthetic ideal has been created which combines the earlier elements with something betokening a heightened aesthetic and intellectual consciousness. The many threads of growth spun during the past centuries are now gathered and woven into a texture both strong and supremely beautiful, so that the plastic tradition of the country emerges, under the Gupts, as a broad and clear stream of sparkling waters running along a distinct and definite course. S.K. Saraswati gives a good description of this process of culmination and unification and draws a well-defined distinction between the main achievements of the Gupt sculpture and those of the preceding age :

"In the Gupta period all the various trends and tendencies of the artistic pursuits of the preceding phases reach their culmination in a unified plastic tradition of supreme import in Indian history. The outstanding achievements of Gupta sculpture are to be studied and understood, hence, in terms of its heritage. Gupta sculpture is the logical outcome of the classical sculpture of Mathura and Amaravati. Its plasticity is derived from that of Mathura, its elegance from that of Amaravati. Yet, a Gupta sculpture seems to belong to a sphere that is entirely different. A refinement and definition of form and a greater delicacy of contour are inherent, no doubt, in the consistent and logical evolution of the classical idiom, and these the Gupta plastic style achieves in a perfectly normal manner. What separates the Gupta sculpture from that of the previous phase is the atmosphere that it breathes.

"The classical art of the previous phase was passionately addicated to this mundane world and it is the physical existence, in the literal sense of the term, that attracted the attention and engrossed the vision of the artists. The lush sensuality of Mathura and the careless abandon of Amaravati undergo a distinct transformation in the hands of the Gupta artists who seem to have been working for a higher ideal. A new outlook appears to have emerged to inspire the artists to rise above this mundane world—the world of senses—and bring their productions within the confines of reason and intellect. The period of the Guptas ushers in a heightened intellectual consciousness which permeates all forms of activity. Literature, sciences, arts, etc., all feel the impulse of this heightened intellectual ferment. A new orientation in the attitude towards art is noticed in the attempt to establish a closer harmony between art and thought, between the outer form and the inner spirit. This leads to new aesthetic aspirations which transcend the world of senses and try to record higher experiences and deeper realisations. Art now becomes the conscious vehicle of the intellectual and spiritual conceptions of the people."[35]

The most important feature in the total scheme of Gupt sculpture is the emphasis

on the idealized human figure. One of the elements which had gained a solid footing in religion, in the three major faiths then current in India, was *murti-puja*, idol-worship. Countless gods and goddesses—or Bodhisatvas and Tirthankars, and their female counterparts—had been imagined and thought out, and all over the land the image-makers were busy fashioning icons and idols to supply the needs of the worshippers. As is well known, this process had now been on for a few centuries, but it was only during the Gupt Age, that full prescriptions as to canons and conventions and perfected techniques and methods were evolved. Guha gives an excellent summary of these:

"Sculptures conformed to certain well-defined canons, one of which was the canon of proportions or *talamana*. The basic unit in proportion is the *tala*, roughly equivalent to the measure of the face from the hair on the forehead to the chin. The *tala* is divided into *angulas*, one *angula* being one twelfth of a *tala*. In order to represent the images of deities the sculptors were enjoined to adopt the *dasatala* or the 'ten-head' measurement. Three varieties of the *dasatala* were evolved : *uttama*, *madhyama* and *adhama*, measuring 124, 120 and 116 *angulas* respectively.

"Subordination of anatomical details is another aesthetic convention of the age. A typical Gupta sculpture—and this is also true of the pre-Guptan sculptures—does not represent the joints of the body and contours of muscle. As a result it became possible for the sculptors to produce an impression of pliability and roundness of figure which, though not naturalistic in the crude sense of the term, is formal, abstract, and supersensuous.

"The aesthetics of gestures (*mudras*), finger-plays and hand-poses...were further developed in the Gupta age. Most frequently used gestures were *katakahasta*, *lolahasta*, and *anjalihasta*. The *katakahasta*, symbolic of the hand holding a lotus, signifies communication. The *anjalihasta* or the gesture of devotion is indicated by two hands joined palm to palm. The *lolahasta*, sometimes called *lambahasta* or *gajahasta*, signifying repose, is represented by the hand hanging down, the arm being kept rigid.

"Various attitudes or *asanas* were vital to the aesthetic canons of the age. The three positions in which figures were represented are : standing, seated, and recumbent. The reclining figure may be illustrated by the Vishnu mounted on Sesha Naga in the Vishnu temple at Deogarh. A standing figure is represented in either of the four poses : *samabhanga* (equally bent pose), *abhanga* (slightly bent pose), *tribhanga* (triple flexion), and *atibhanga* (extremely bent pose). The South Indian images of Nataraja, for example, are representatives of *atibhanga* pose, suggesting dynamic movement and violent emotion. The three familiar seated postures are : *vajraparyanka* (adamantine pose), *padmaparyanka* (slightly relaxed pose), and *ardhaparyanka* (relaxed pose).

"All these canons were drawn upon freely by Gupta artists for the representation of human and superhuman figures. With regard to feminine beauty also there were set conventions. Artists and poets sought analogies from animal and vegetable forms to construct the ideal of feminine charm. The face of a woman, it was felt, should be round like a hen's egg or like the moon. Full breasts should resemble

'blooming lotuses and inverted golden pots'. Thighs were likened to plantain stalks, while a thin waist was modelled on the attenuated middle of a wasp. The lips were compared to the *bimba* fruit, the chin to the mango stone, the neck to the conch shell. Different expressions of eyes were suggested by different nature similies. Thus innocent maidens were said to be fawn-eyed, and the restless glance of a handsome girl was compared to the darting little *safari* fish."[36]

However, conventions cannot be made into a concoction and good results achieved automatically. The artist of this period had learnt to take interest in the life around him and to idealise the reality. Thus, in the words of the same critic, "a perfect balance between the sensuous and the supersensuous was established, and the cleavage between sense and spirit, which was wide in the sculptures of earlier schools, disappeared." Or, as Coomaraswamy puts it, "Gupta art is the flower of an established tradition, a polished and perfected medium like the Sanskrit language, for the statement of thought and feeling ; and having thus become an ordered language with a grammar and vocabulary of its own, its forms are by hypothesis conventioned ('agreed upon') and ideal .."[37]

The Gupt Empire extended far and wide and, naturally, art flourished at several centres and in various regions. Reference has been made already to Mathura and Sarnath. Other noteworthy centres of high sculptural achievement were in the region of Gwalior and Jhansi. There we find the temple of Devgarh with its carvings of Hindu gods and scenes from mythology which constitute the beginning of the so-called mediaeval style. Even as the standing Buddh of Mathura and the sitting Master of Sarnath show one facet of the art of idol-making, so from Gwalior comes the magnificent sculpture of Surya, the Sun-god, radiating, as it were the light of faith from another sector, Hinduism. The same elements of "serenity, security and certainty," which mark the work at Sarnath, inform this image of the Hindu god. The convention was already established that divine beings were always to be represented in their youth. Indeed, old age seems to have been banished generally from the realm of artistic representation. Thus, while the Buddh icon at Sarnath emphasises majesty and serenity, the Sun-god's image depicts splendour, blended with cheerfulness making him "the god of a good-natured happy people." There are several other types and pieces of this age which deserve mention but there will be no end to the praise which one could go on bestowing on the beauty and marvellous execution of all art of this period. However, before we close this brief account of the Gupt period, a reference must be made to the Great Boar carved in relief at the entrance to a cave at Udayagiri, near Sanchi. Basham accords it high praise : "The body of the god Visnu, who became a mighty boar to rescue the earth from the cosmic ocean, conveys the impression of a great primeval power working for good against the forces of chaos and destruction, and bears a message of hope, strength and assurance. The greatness of the god in comparison with his creation is brought out by the tiny female figure of the personified earth, clinging to his tusk. The deep feeling which inspired the carving of this figure makes it perhaps the only theriomorphic image in the world's art which conveys a truly

religious message to modern man."[38]

While we are at it, let us take note of one very important point. This pertains to the development and standardisation of the icons of the various faiths then prevalent in the land. By the time the Gupta Age comes to an end the conventions regarding each god and goddess were fixed for all time. In respect of the image of each, the proportions of the body and limbs and features, or any other special attributes, were all rigidly defined and strictly adhered to. For the great artist there was still scope for good work and he could provide some variety within the conventional limits; but, by and large, there was a tendency to stylise the cult-images and, as art declined generally after the classical period, these idols and icons were affected in particular. In connection with Khajuraho's sculptural art, nothing is, broadly speaking, poorer and more disappointing than its idols and cult-images.

This Golden Age of Indian art ended, so far as the Gupts are concerned, around the sixth century. In the North, at least for some time, there is evidence of an overall fall in the standards of excellence. But nothing proves better that India is a continent rather than a country than the fact that, while in one part of this vast land there is an apparent decline, whether in this field or that, there is, at the same time, in some other part, something new and splendid coming up, if it is not already matured and perfected. Thus, as the classical art of the Gupts comes to an end, the Indian plastic tradition finds an equally vigorous and magnificent expression in the South. The dynasties concerned this time are the Chalukyas and the Pallavs. The sculptural decorations of the temples at Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal, add conspicuously to the ornamental wealth which by now starts becoming associated with temple architecture. On the other hand, there are the great monolithic shrines of Mahabalipuram, and that wondrous relief of the Descent of the Ganga, which carry on the tradition of the rock-cut *chaityas* of the Early Classical Age, although for sheer craftsmanship there is no comparison whatsoever. Finally, what is achieved by the Chalukyas and the Pallavs is out-classed and out-matched by the stupendous work of the Rashtrakuts at Ellora. Their Kailash temple is a marvel of the sculptural art. Of course, there are other examples of the rock-cut sculptures of the western region like the Trimurti at Elephanta—even though of a later date—and the cave-structure at Ellora itself. But Kailash belongs to the gallery of the world's masterpieces of art and it can be, without exaggeration, considered as one of the supreme creations of human hands. There is a blending and fusion of much that is contrary; and this with such felicity and effectiveness, that the most superlative language would hardly do justice to its magnificence, both as to conception and execution. Obviously, this structure constitutes the culmination of the work of the sculptors of the mediaeval cave-temples and one critic, Irwin, has this to say in description and praise of the temple we are considering:

"The sculptors of the mediaeval cave-temples were organized in guilds, each monument being the result of corporate effort. The climax of the tradition is reached at Ellora, in the carving of the eighth-century Kailasa temple. Here the

sculptor departs from the previously established technique of quarrying horizontally into the hillside. Instead, he has used the narrow Indian chisel and mallet to cut through a hundred feet of virgin rock from above, leaving a solid mass of rock, sixty feet in height, from which the carving of the temple itself was begun. The interior of the temple was excavated through its doors and windows, the sculptor working from the top downwards and sideways, and the reliefs being left to the last when they were probably executed by specialized craftsmen ..The Kailasa sculptors tried to create the effect of movement and cut their figures in deep relief in order to achieve this end. The surrounding walls of rock, as well as the sides of the temple itself, are profusely carved with images of the popular deities, animals, and scenes from the epics , and just as Buddhism had earlier absorbed the Yakshis of the local cults, so we note here the incorporation of numerous village deities as consorts of the major gods. There is no contradiction in the fact that this sculpture is at the same time an art conspicuous both for its conventional iconography and for its astonishing life quality. To the mediaeval Indian sculptor, no less than to his contemporary in Europe, the rules of iconography were of the utmost importance. The main point, however, is that they were important not as conventional imperatives imposed from without, but as living symbols in a community culture."[39]

What is more, the Kailash is about the greatest example in the world of the oft-repeated axiom that sculpture and architecture are twin sisters. It has been observed earlier how, in the case of the temples of Khajuraho, these two arts, architecture and sculpture, are one and indivisible. Here at Ellora, in the temple of Kailash, architecture is sculpture truly and *vice versa*. All in all, these various works of the southern and western kingdoms carry on the conventions and traditions of the Classical Age. Further, they add to it elements which bring us nearer to that phase in the story of Indian sculpture with which the mediaeval period proper begins, and to which the great temples of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Orissa and Central India, and therefore of Khajuraho, belong.

All these temples are grouped together because they have many common characteristics, in respect of both the architectural conventions and the sculptural traditions. It is customary to say about them that together they represent the point at which architecture and sculpture are no longer two separate elements–the latter being superimposed upon the former–but make one organic whole. The total structural movement is a kind of synthetic gesture in which, like the two hands of an Indian classical dancer, these two sister arts move with a closely interlinked rhythm and effect. O.C. Gangoly makes, in his usual scholarly way, very pertinent remarks about what he calls "this love marriage of the twin forms of art" :

"Throughout the whole history of Art, in the East and the West, sculpture has stood in the relation of a twin-brother to Architecture, embraced by one integrated principle of plasticity—creating in the same breath structural as well as imitative or symbolical forms. The rows of colossal portraits of the Pharaohs which punctuate the Temple of Amon in Dynastic architecture in Egypt, 'Reclining Theseus' on the East pediment of the Parthenon in Greece, the Frieze of Archers on the

Glazed tile of the palace of Darius, and the interminable rows of Saints and Donators on the vibrating Portals of Gothic Cathedrals of France,—Chartres, Amiens or Notre Dame, are vivid illustrations of the principle—that sculpture grows out of the facades of architecture—even like foams out of the surface of the waves of the ocean. This love-marriage of the twin forms of art—is equally well demonstrated on the facades of all Indian monuments—from the Gates of Sanchi to the monolithic temples of the Seven Pagodas. Sculpture and Architecture must co-exist and support each other—in one integrated plastic role.

"This age-old plastic unity between sculpture and architecture is once again demonstrated in a vivid manner—in the monuments of the Chandelas at Khajuraho."[40]

Indeed, some critics will go even further and make sculpture the more weighty of the two. Mulk Raj Anand, for instance, says this .

"In fact, in the new scheme, sculpture becomes dominant and the whole temple begins to look like a giant carving, reaching up to the heavens, with detailed embellishment of Gods and Goddesses and celestial beauties and human beings and animals, in an intricate array of the metaphysical story of creation, where there is no beginning and no end.

"This triumph of sculpture over architecture, which is witnessed so dramatically in Khajuraho, is to dominate the whole mediaeval tradition from Central and Eastern India to the South, until well into the 18th century.

"(And) the evolution is organic."[41]

There are, of course, differences and deviations—structural as well as stylistic ; and here slight, and there rather large—in respect of the various groups mentioned above. For example, between the temples of Orissa and those in Central India there are several elements which distinctly belong to one group or the other, and distinguish and stamp the monuments of Khajuraho as different and apart from those of, shall we say, Bhubaneswar. But, by and large, the generalisation made above holds good in the case of both these groups as well as for the temples of Rajasthan and Gujarat. In addition, the tradition of temple art has arrived at a stage where all the possible spade-work, if one may say so, has already been done. All the experiments, whether in respect of the material, themes, techniques, the spirit and the ideals, or with regard to canons, conventions and injunctions of all manner and kind, have been made. All the permutations and combinations of the sensuous, the spiritual and the sensual—except the *mithun* proper, or, perhaps, *improper*—have been more or less tried out. All the variations upon the theme within the scope and limitations of the particular art have been elaborated. Even the high mark of excellence as well as the low in any field has been indicated. Iconography has been fixed and finalised. The human figure, both male and female, has been conventionalised, idealised and the ideal normalised. Nothing remains for the artists to do except to achieve through their skill and virtuosity, and by combining the various elements to hand, something which does honour to the immensely rich heritage they have received as a gift from generations of fellow-workers that have preceded them. The tradition handed on to them

is at once a help and a challenge : a help, because the paths have been smoothed in all directions, and models as well as instruments supplied for excellent work ; a challenge, because something new has to be created, something extraordinary, something which is in line with the traditional and yet is not hidebound, conventional, dry, dull, dead. It is a tribute to the artists of Orissa and Central India, and of Rajasthan and Gujarat, that they were able to accept the challenge and to produce a galaxy of new constructions during the next few centuries which, beauteous and elegant in a new way, still stand as a most valuable part of the great tradition of architecture and sculpture in our country. The Chandel sculptors, like the Chandel architects, have made a particularly happy contribution which is exclusively their own. They have evolved forms and styles and certain gestures and mannerisms which have lent a distinctiveness to their work. But before we take up the matter of the Chandel sculptural style it would be helpful to understand the sculptural traditions and conventions common to all Hindu temples.

Of the general place and placing of the images and other sculptural elements of the temple, Stella Kramrisch, that great authority on the Hindu temple, speaks thus :

"Viewed from the outside the Prasada is a monument on whose multi-buttressed walls are displayed the images.. Apart from the main images in their niches and indispensable to all temples are the images of the Astadikpalas, the Guardians of the Eight points of space, each in its correct location. The multitude of divine figures stationed between these two kinds of essential images, each on a facet and having a console of its own are Nagas, Sardulas, Apsaras, Surasundaris Mithuns etc., and certain specific images of the lesser gods.

"Each such type of the 'surrounding divinities' is repeated in many variations of posture and movement on the walls of the temple ; like the chorus in an Indian Yatra performance anouncing the particular passage of the play not once only, but by repetition in the four directions of space. Repetition and symmetrical response are the rule in the horizontal and also in the vertical; so that the mind of the devotee becomes moved afresh by the beauties of the Divine and its graces at each angle, assured of its boons and of fearlessness."

In the context of celestial figures, she says further: "The gods represented by Indian sculpture belong to definite types for they body forth definite aspects of divine being—the peaceful (Santa), the terrific (Ugra), etc. The iconographical physiognomy of the face is also that of the body ; the body of the terrific image, for example, is inflated with divine fury as are the bulging eyes, etc. Typological iconography is a highly specified science ; it comprises the wide range of emotions classified in 9 categories. Combined and rarified they are the substratum of the divine countenance while in its structure of ideal proportions ethnical traits are not forgotten which belong to the people in whose midst the images were made...

"Their radiance reflects the features of the people who worship them. Thus they are differently proportioned in North India and in the South ; their countenance indeed varies in expression from one part of the country to the other and in each age

according to the prevailing aptitude of the realisation of supreme bliss and peace. Irrespective however of these and other limiting conditions the many degrees in which beatitude shines forth from the face of the image are carried on unruffled expanses of modelling as delicate, taut and as non-human as are the shapes of flower-petals and ripe fruits. All these faces shine; they have a silent radiance of which the lips tell nothing nor do the eyes ever smile...

"This particular quality is not confined to any type or province of Indian temple sculpture. It arises from existence itself realising itself in an enduring recognition, an ever active memory, completely made conscious to itself. The place of this realization is the body. The different physiognomical types, particular to the different parts of India, are its substratum. The schools of Indian sculpture differ as much as the human types reflected in the images of the gods. The metaphysical realisation to which the images give shape requires the figure of man as reference; on becoming an image, made by art, in stone, etc., it is transformed and transubstantiated. The frame, however, of this body made by art is measured according to the perfect proportion of the body of man."

Perfect proportion of the body of man! And that when the body is really young and beautiful:

"The smooth limbs of the images of the gods are always sixteen years old; they are resilient with the sap of life and with breath. The latter makes them not only smooth and supple but also weightless in appearance despite their ample curves. They are particularly fit not only for dancing but also for flying, the many Ganas, Vidyadharas, etc.—although they never have wings. Ends of garments flutter to enhance their movements and be a foil to their rhythms; whereas folded scarves clasp their fullness and are carved as if they were a special type of jewellery, accentuating through the contrast of their own shape and texture that of the modelled body."

And as in the case of their features which reflect those of the people who worship them, so with other details. Indeed, it is literally true to say that everywhere man has made his gods in his own image:

"Garments, jewellery and coiffure of the images are a selection and enhancement of those worn in the respective country where the temple was built. The preference of the sculptor however is for the bare body and he makes sparing use only of garments; worn in the shape of a *dhoti*, the cloth clings to the body and is recognisable as a rule only by such patterns as are engraved on the modelled shapes of the limbs; and by carving the hem of the cloth, petal-like or as if it were one more garment of the smooth limbs. Thus all forms of apparel accentuate and accompany the smooth roundness of the figures and their movement; only the headgear and coiffure are additional volumes of sculptural consequence; the high crowns (mukuta) of the greater gods, add height to the image whereas the chignons (dhammilla) which the lesser gods and goddesses disport at the back of their heads add their globular or horn shaped bulges, as required in each particular instance, to the ponderosity or the linear composition of the image. Coronets, chaplets, diadems,

etc., add to the breadth or the height as required and to the adornment of the egg or globe shape of the head. Straight or acquiline but always powerfully salient noses are thus balanced."[42]

Let us revert to the Chandel artists, and see how they modified the conventional and the traditional, and created something so distinctly their own that one can always tell the Khajuraho sculpture from the rest. In his work, *The Art of the Chandelas*, Gangoly gives a detailed account of all this :

"(They) have evolved in the faces of their images, in their jewelleries, draperies and coiffeurs, and in the treatment of their figures—certain special characteristics and artistic conventions—certain manners, if not mannerisms,—which help us to identify the style by means of these significant characteristic and stylist features. The figural types created by the Chandela artists—always appear in standing poses,—however extravagant the gesture. The design springs from below like a growing thing. The treatment of limbs is curvilinear,—but austerely so,—the straight lines of the lower parts of the body and of the arms being used to develop the swelling hips and breasts. Arms and hands are very vividly treated, the drawing of the gesture, however perfect, never degenerating into a dominant silhouette. The sense of movement is never linear in origin—but always in three dimensions. It is obvious that such an art is based upon a special sense of form.

"The outstanding character—is the peculiar treatment of the physiognomy of face—the rendering of the eye-brows, the eyes, the nose and the lips. The form of the face is elliptical like the egg *(andakriti)* full and rounded at the chins. In profile—the nose is on the same place as the brow—angular at the tips of the nose, the lips and the chin. In a full-face front-view—the nostrils—spread out almost to the length of the lips. But the most characteristic features are the half-open, and sometimes, drooping eyes—and the peculiar treatment of the eye-brows. Each eye-brow is designed in a long beautiful curve—in raised ridges—terminating near the root of the nose—but they rarely touch each other. A Chandela sculpture can be easily identified—by the treatment of the eye-brows. The next characteristic feature—is the treatment of the hair—with the strokes of the hairs—lightly but not too emphatically rendered—in the case of the male types—but are projected in two series of emphatic curls at the centre. The lower boundary of hair is almost parallel to the linear rhythm of the eye-brow lending to the forehead a short crescent form. In the case of Shiva and other Shaivaite images—the matted locks are arranged in various kinds of artistic folds and sometimes arranged in the form of a bridge across the head. But generally the coiffeur of Shiva's matted locks—is in the form of a conical pyramid. In the case of women,—particularly, of *apsaras* and *nayikas*, the strokes of the comb on the hair are not indicated and the hair is rendered in one mass-sitting on the head like a cap, casting thick shadows at the edges of the brow. In other important types of Celestial dancers, *nayikas*, the tresses are arranged on the top of the head in beautiful coils of stepped pyramids—held together with large wooden (?) hairpins—the combined effect is that of a fine little coronate—which lends to these attractive young damsels a fine dress of dalliance. Most of women-

figures wear—a thin scarf with a regular series of folds, which come round the back —go round the busts—and descend down the shoulders in a rhythmic curve—stopping below the waist near the buttocks to which the ends of the scarf point with significant deliberation. Even in the case of nude damsels—the twisting scarf across the torso is rarely omitted. The purpose of this introduction of the scarf with its four regular folds—is to draw attention to the smooth surface of the body—and its delicate, shapely modulations.

"In the case of the important icons—the treatment of the jewellery is more elaborate and precise—but far less perfunctory and summary—as compared with the minute and meticulous treatment of jewelleries on the important images of Orissa (e.g. Parvati, Kartikeya—in the Lingaraja temple, Orissa). The Khajuraho images are generally decked with a one-string pearl necklace round the neck *(upa-griva)* below which is placed—a *hara* with lozenge forms diminishing towards the end. They are meant to represent a neck-piece of sapphire or ruby—strung together with golden attachments. Then comes a broad chest-piece—which descend from the shoulders tending to meet near the breast—and actually terminating there. The male has always the sacred thread descending down the left part of the torso. The other items of male jewellery—are the *udara-vandha* and the *uru-mala* on the two thighs—with a tassel between the two. The *vana-mala* is given, indiscriminately, to Shaiva and Vaisnava images, this is typically illustrated in the image of Shiva, Lakshmana temple. The jewellery worn by the women-figures are generally more simple and summary, with the addition of a pair of wristlets (*bahuti*) and the *nupura* on the feet. The average number of jewelleries include *upa-griva, hara, udara-vandha* (with a tassel), *uru-mala, nupura* and, sometime armlets on the upper arm."[43]

In the chapter on architecture we have already discussed at length the main developments in respect of the structural elements—the form and design and the co-ordination of the various components, horizontal as well as vertical—of the category of temples to which the monuments of Khajuraho belong. The typical Khajuraho temple has also been analysed already from the same point of view. Since the architecture and sculpture of these temples is really one entity and indivisible, it is illogical, in a way, to analyse these two separately. However, for the sake of convenience they have been taken up separately; and having done this in regard to architecture, let us attempt a classification and appreciation of the sculptural work of the Chandel artists.

Obviously, the theory of indivisibility of the two arts does not cover the free standing images or isolated figures whether inside the temple as idols or outside. The phrase, "architecture is sculpture and *vice versa*," applies rather to the beautiful sculptural bands and friezes which adorn and beautify the temple and yet are an integrated part of the total design. But one way or other, the wealth of sculptural decoration, the total activity involved, whether of mason or sculptor, was so great that some authorities estimate that at one time at least 10,000 workmen must have been busy chiselling out that carven loveliness, a part of which still remains to gladden our souls. These remnants of the sculptural treasure created at the behest

of the Chandel rulers can be divided into six main categories: (1) cult-images installed in the sanctum; (2) *parivar, parshv* and *avaran-devatas* including *dikpals* and many other gods and goddesses; (3) *apsaras* or *sursundaris* and *nayikas*; (4) sculptures depicting secular themes; (5) sculptures of animals, natural as well as mythical; and (6) *mithuns*.

In the first category are the images of Shiv, Vishnu and Surya, and the Tirthankars etc. installed for worship. These cult-images, long conventionalised, were required to be carved strictly according to the canons and injunctions laid down for the purpose. "The cult image", says one authority, "was mainly conceived as an object to be used by the devotee to help concentrating his mind for realization of an ultimate object outside the image itself. The image had thus no inherent relation either with the devotee or with the artist; it existed apart and was identical neither with his inner experience nor with his ultimate object."[44] As has been pointed out earlier, the result was that images of popular deities like Vishnu, Shiv, Surya, Parvati, Lakshmi etc. became stereotyped and were usually executed with efficiency but without much artistic merit. That is why in the sphere of cult-images, "a procession of endless monotony of form, uninformed by any inner experience and without any registration of individual creative genius, meets the eye."[45] This does not mean that these idols were altogether unworthy as objects of art. On the contrary, they were of a fair standard of excellence due to "accumulated knowledge of a high order and inheritance of a rich and prolonged experience on the one hand, and well and correctly laid regulations of mathematic relations, of artistic proportion and balance, and of ritual and iconography on the other."[46] The main point is that there was hardly much deviation, or real development, in respect of the fashioning of these cult-images: "Everywhere the art moves within the limits of established practice and within canonical injunctions" and "along the arrow-line of time in more or less uniform pace."[47] Some exceptions there certainly are, as, for instance, the image of the principal deity of the Chaturbhuj temple. Colossal in size, this idol, standing in an elegant *tribhang* pose, possesses an expression of high majesty and great serenity.

The various gods and goddesses, grouped under *parivar, parshva* and *avaran-devatas*, are seen in the niches, or are sculpted against the walls, of the temple. They are carved in the round either in high or bas-relief. Some of these gods and goddesses belong to the first category, of the cult-images; some are *dikpals* (Regents of the Quarters); the remaining figures, less formal, complete the group of divinites and help lend to the temple the illusion of heaven. Of the last variety of gods and goddesses, Krishna Deva says this: "These usually stand in a lively *tri-bhanga* and are distinguishable from human figures only by their peculiar head-dress (*jata-, kirita-* or *karanda-mukuta*), or by their mounts or special attributes, held usually in more than two hands. In most cases the gods wear the same dress and ornaments as human figures and are to be distinguished from the latter by a sign of diamond on the chest (it is the same as the *kaustubha-mani* on the chest of Vishnu and the *srivatsa-lanchhana* on the chest of *jina* figures) and by a long *mala*, resembling the

*vaijayantimala* of Vishnu, which constitute the cognizances of gods at Khajuraho."[48]

The next classification of the sculptures of Khajuraho consists of the *apsaras* and *nayikas*. The *apsaras* or the *sursundaris* are there ostentatiously as the entertainers of the gods. These celestial nymphs and their counterparts on earth, the *nayikas*, all blessed with grace and youth and beauty and charm of an exceptionally high order, are an extremely important and really attractive element of the sculptural decoration of Khajuraho. They deserve a much fuller treatment and we shall take them up again in the next chapter.

Then, there are whole friezes and stray pieces of sculpture pertaining to secular themes. These cover different subjects like domestic scenes, groups of preachers and disciples, group dancers and musicians, scenes of rituals and ceremonies, and so forth. They make interesting studies and provide some evidence about the life and society of those times.

The fifth category consists of animal studies which include some remarkable representations of several real as well as mythical animals. Of special interest are the *shardul*, the lion, the cosmic boar and a rat. The *shardul*, a heraldic and fabulous beast, is a popular theme at Khajuraho and is invested with rich, symbolic significance and meaning.

Finally, there are the *mithuns*, the erotic couples or groups, which, strictly speaking, belong to the category of secular themes. However, the good name, or bad, which these erotic sculptures have earned, requires that special notice be taken of their existence and implications. They are dealt with at great length in some of the later chapters. There, the entire issue of the erotic art *vis-a-vis* Indian temples, and those of Khajuraho in particular, is considered fully, freely and frankly.

Before we close this seemingly long, and yet, actually, just cursory study of the sculptures of Khajuraho, a word or two should be added in respect of the beautiful sculptural bands which adorn and embellish the outer and inner wall-surfaces of these exquisite Chandel temples. It is these figure-sculptures which once made Khajuraho a city famed "for the richness and magnificence of its architecture and sculpture", and which still constitute a major part of its wealth and attraction.

The distinguishing characteristics of these sculptures include, first and foremost, their integration with the element of architecture which has already been pointed out. The sculptured bands are no mere ornaments but are fitted into the plan and scheme of the building. They help to heighten the effect of verticality and rise, and assist the beholder in raising his vision, symbolically from the ground to the *shikhar* with its crown and finial, its *amalak* and *kalash*, which represents the merging of the human in the divine. In Mr. Munshi's apt phrase the figures "emerge from their niches", and each with its separate pedestal and canopy becomes an individual, retaining, nevertheless, its due place, as a part of the whole composition. This aspect—of sculpture as architecture—is expressed in carved figures which, often arranged in three bands, go round the waist of the temple. And unique as architectural ornament and sculptural embellishment, they constitute a most original contribution of the Chandel sculptors.

Human or divine, *apsaras* or *nayikas,* the figures which these sculptural bands portray are indeed charming. One can get lost in studying them since in them the artist has created a whole population, each member of which has an irresistible individual appeal. As Stella Kramrisch remarks, "With every movement of the eye of the beholder, a new perspective shows the images from a different angle ; to avoid being bewildered he has to concentrate on each of them ..and then give his attention to the next."[49] Another critic, Percy Brown, also pays a generous tribute to the effect produced by these bands :

"Some of the figures are apparently ideal human beings, while others are divine personages, but all in elegant attitudes and some are posed with a Hellenic grace recalling the rhythmic forms on a classic vase. Unlike the sombre saints who look down from Gothic niches, those on the walls of the Khajuraho temples are of a warm and gladsome nature, living in a happy golden age, when time was one long sequence of pleasurable experiences. With such an animated throng ever present on these structures it is not remarkable that the architecture pulsates with a human vitality, not ordinarily found in the building art."[50]

Finally, here is a scholarly summing-up of the place and value of the sculptures of Khajuraho in the total tradition, by Krishna Deva :

"The sculptural art of Khajuraho draws amply on the classical tradition but is essentially mediaeval. Situated as Khajuraho is in the heart of central India, which is open to the artistic influences from the east and the west, its art is a happy combination of the sensuousness of the east with the nervous angular modelling of the western idiom. Though this art cannot compare with the classical Gupta art in sublimity, depth of feeling and expression of inner experience of the artist, it pulsates with a human vitality which is amazing. One is struck by the immensity and throbbing warmth of the Khajuraho sculptures which are completely liberated from their wall-surface and stand out almost fully in the round as enchanting lyrics of modelled beauty.

"The modelling at Khajuraho generally lacks the flow which characterizes the sculptures of the Gupta age. The plastic volume is usually ample but stereotyped, indicating a thinning down of the plastic vision. The plasticity of the fully-rounded and modelled form is replaced by sharp edges and pointed angles, with a stress on horizontals, verticals and diagonals. Nevertheless, the art of Khajuraho surpasses even the mediaeval school of Orissa in revealing the sensuous and many-sided charms of the human body. Inspired by an ecstatic joy of living and a consuming passion for the physical beauty, the artist of Khajuraho revelled in admiring the human body from the most fascinating angles which give us fine profiles and the unusual three-quarter profiles and back views. The walls of the Khajuraho temples are a veritable gallery of female types of ravishing beauty, vaunting their voluptuous charms in an infinite variety of lovely attitudes and postures. In fact, this art excels all other contemporary schools of art in the vivid portrayal of human moods and fancies which are often expressed through the medium of gestures and flexions with a subtle but purposive sensuous provocation. Coquettish languor and frankly

erotic suggestion form the key-notes which distinguish the Khajuraho art from the contemporary schools of art."[51]

From the *Hayashirsh-Panchratra*, a Vaishnav text, we learn that if images are beautiful, divinity draws near willingly. The artists of Khajuraho went further. They fashioned beautiful images in such quantity and of such quality, and invested them with such elegance and excellence, that their display and diversity creates "a World of Beauty". To them, to these Chandel artists, who created this world of beauty, all honour and our salute !

# 7

# Apsaras and Nayikas

*Then from the agitated deep up sprung*
*The legion of Apsarases, so named*
*That to the watery element they owed*
*Their being. Myriads were they born, and all*
*In vesture heavenly clad, and heavenly gems:*
*Yet more divine their native semblance, rich*
*With all the gifts of grace, of youth and beauty.*
*A train innumerous followed; yet thus fair,*
*Nor god nor demon sought their wedded love:*
*Thus Raghava! they still remain—their charms*
*The common treasure of the host of heaven.*

THE RAMAYAN: WILSON

IN the lovely little universe created by the sculptors of Khajuraho, beautiful females claim a prominent place. Indeed, one might say that the world of Khajuraho is, above all, the world of female beauty. As we have seen, there are denizens of various worlds — gods and men, *yakshs*, *gandharvs* and *gans*; *nags* and animals; and all the floral and vegetable representations in one temple or another. But, more than all these, what the Khajuraho monuments seem determined to present is Woman, beautiful in all her charm and allurement. Innumerable carvings of young and seductive damsels, mortal and celestial, adorn the walls of the temples. It is not always easy to distinguish between the heavenly members of the species and the earthly, but the divine beauties are generally content to vaunt "their voluptuous charms in an infinite variety of attitudes",[1] displaying a languid and calculated charm. The others, the *nayikas*—the heroines—"are generally represented in the secular occupations of various kinds of toilette: some twisting their braid, some coloring their feet with lac dye, some putting on the *tilaka* according to the reflection in the

mirror held in the hand, some handling the powder box, others standing in merely absorbing poses, revealing various moods of love."[2] Critic after critic is struck by the beauty and voluptuousness with which these figures are informed. "Besides the images of gods and goddesses", says Mitra, "there are plenty of three-dimensional representations of youthful damsels,—*nayikas, apsaras* and *surasundaries* brilliantly illuminating the temple walls." Of these figures of living beauty each one "expresses a particular mood of mind or an action."[3] In one particular temple, the Vaman, "we look", remarks Benjamin Rowland, "upon a double tier of naked apsaras in a celestial chorus, vaunting their voluptuous charms in an infinite variety of attitudes displaying a 'languid and calculated eroticism', rendered the more provocative by the contrast between the slim bodies and the towering complication of the head-dresses. These dancers in the heaven of Indra are, according to legend, creatures not made of gross flesh but constituted rather of the air and the movements that compose their heavenly dances ; they are here as appropriate 'entertainers' in the reconstructed heaven that is the fabric of the sanctuary."[4] K.M. Munshi notes, in passing, some of the moods of the "eternal woman" portrayed in stone : "The reminiscent mood is expressed in one sculpture. Another expresses the indolent mood ; a third shows anxiety to get ready; a fourth keenness to adorn herself, and a fifth anxiety to do so. Still another figure describes tense attention in removing a thorn from the foot. The woman with the mirror is lost in self-admiration. Her complacent smile and the intently adoring eyes fixed on her reflection show her the eternal woman as she stands before a mirror."[5] And there are many more who go into raptures over the carven wealth of womanly loveliness so richly displayed at Khajuraho. Since the *apsaras* were deep-born and heaven-dwelling, the problem of the sculptor was to carve, out of coarse stone, bodies constituted not of flesh, but rather of air "rich with all the gifts of grace, of youth and beauty". The loveliness of the *apsaras* had to have an ethereal quality which would be the envy and despair of their mortal rivals. Or what else is art for ?

But the artists were human, and so they made the earthly females in no way less lovely than these "daughters of pleasure", women of the gods, the *sursundaris*. This was the least they owed to the women of earth who had given them such exquisite dreams. Consequently, we may marvel over figure after figure of enticing beauty, subtle and delicate and voluptuous, and carved to perfection as to mood and technique. And not one but many a chiselled piece will deserve what Dushyant said when he saw Shakuntala :

*"She is God's vision, of pure thought*
*Composed in His creative mind;*
*His reveries of beauty wrought*
*The peerless pearl of mankind."*

And since Shakuntala was the daughter of an *apsara*, all beauty is inter-related, and these *nayikas* and *sursundaris* are but different spangles throbbing with the same lustre.

Of course, the phenomenon of the representation of these beauties, human or

divine, is far from being a unique feature of the temples of Khajuraho. On the contrary, woman is one of the commonest motifs of Indian temple sculpture, as it is of art, sculpture or painting, or poetry anywhere in the world. But, the Chandel artists seem to have decided to portray woman in all her wealth of beauty and attractiveness, as if there were some hidden challenge to outdo a rival. One wonders if this was Ajanta, where the masters had used "woman as their best decorative asset with brilliant zest and extraordinary knowledge. Woman is the finest achievement of their art and obviously the most admired theme. They use women like flowers, garlands of girls surround their Rajas and their Princes, embellish their palaces, dominate their street scenes, crowd the windows of their cities, and are often painted . for the sheer joy of painting them, and with no perceivable literary or religious intention. As Apsaras or radiant Peris they float across the porches ; as sirens they lure the sailor to his doom ; but chiefly they shine for us as mortals, and as mortals these artists depicted them best and most often. They painted them at the toilette, in repose, gossiping, sitting, standing, always with a wonder akin to awe. They did not pose women ; they simply copied their poses."[6] Were the masters at Khajuraho doing the same, in their own way, and portraying these women of beauty and the beauty of women for the sheer joy of portraying them? It was customary to endow temples with an entourage not only of priests but also of *devdasis*, dancers of the gods on earth, like the *apsaras* in heaven. Perhaps the Khajuraho temples had their own beauties who could pose for the artists, be living models for all the loveliness that is carved upon the walls. In his fine monograph on Khajuraho, Mulk Raj Anand remarks on this matter thus : "Conjecture, myth and speculation, will always, in the absence of historical documentation, weave ever new webs to explain the miraculous appearance, all in a hundred years, of a belief in the life force so potent as is reflected on the walls, as also the presence of so many lovely women, transformed into *Surasundaris*, by the sensitive chisels of the craftsmen. Some say that the most beautiful women were brought from Magadha, Malwa and Rajputana to be trained as devadasis in the Khajuraho temples. And it is alleged further that as these devadasis were lovely women, dedicated to the ceremonies of the Gods, there is no evidence of children on the walls. 'So much love, so many lovely flowers but no fruit !' Other people say that the Gods and *Surasundaris* who cover the interiors and the exteriors of the temples, were taken from real life and put there against the stylised Gods and Goddesses of the high reaches."[7]

Not that it was necessary to have living models, *devdasis* from Magadh, Malwa and Rajputana, or even local women, to draw upon. The concepts and ideals of female beauty, *apsara* or *nayika*, goddess or woman, were set conventions by the time the Chandel artists were called upon to handle the theme. Both religious and secular literature was full of minutely drawn portraits of the beautiful female. Every detail, of limb and dress, of natural contours and artistic ornament, was delineated in terms as perfect as they were clear. The myth of the creation of woman was itself full of the beautiful : "In the beginning, when Twashtri (the

Divine Artificer) came to the creation of woman he found that he had exhausted his materials in the making of man and that no solid elements were left. In this dilemma, after profound meditation, he did as follows :—He took the rotundity of the moon and the curves of creepers, and the clinging of tendrils, and the trembling of grass, and the slenderness of the reed, and the bloom of flowers, and the lightness of leaves, and the tapering of the elephant's trunk, and the glances of deer, and the clustering of rows of bees, and the joyous gaiety of sunbeams, and the weeping of clouds, and the fickleness of the winds, and the timidity of the hare, and the softness of the parrot's bosom, and the hardness of adamant, and the sweetness of honey, and the cruelty of the tiger, and the warm glow of fire, and the coldness of snow, and the chattering of jays, and the cooing of kokila, and the hypocrisy of the crane, and the fidelity of the chakrawaka ; and, compounding all these together, he made woman, and gave her to man."

Ignoring for the moment the "contrariness" which has obviously gone into the making of woman's being and nature, let us note how the sweet and lovely elements have been crowded with such abundance into this delight and torment, this saviour and snare of man. All beauty is naturally attractive to man ; woman combining both beauty and the power of sex has always been doubly so. "Beauty is but the splendour of God and divine light extended to all created objects, but the divine reflection has chosen to shine with the greatest brilliance in woman's body," says Agrippa in his *Excellence of Woman*. The dictum was accepted with zest by the Hindu poet and artist who lavished all their imagination and skill on the creation, in word, colour or stone, of this gem of creation.

The ideal type of the woman beautiful was developed in sculpture centuries after literature had portrayed it in ceaseless detail. The epics, the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat*, had furnished example after example of womanly beauty, both mortal and divine. The stock cases include, of course, the *nayikas* and the *apsaras*. With the lack of inhibition so typical of these works, Ravan, the would-be ravisher, had spoken to Sita thus : "Of the right size, pointed, smooth, and white are thy teeth , thine eyes are wide and great, unblemished, and with red corners, and black pupils ; thy secret parts are spread wide and firmly swell ; thy thighs are as elephant's trunks ; thy two breasts have a fair, firm-swelling, with lifted nipples, graceful, smooth, and like unto wine-palm fruits." Again, in the same epic, when he sees the *apsara* Rambha, "still more eloquent does this woman-worshipper and the poet himself become." "Just at this time, Ravana saw the most splendid of all Apsarases, Rambha with the full moon face, decked with heavenly ornament, he saw her going along ..with heaven's sandalwood her limbs were annointed, her hair was decked with mandara-flowers, with heaven's flowers was Rambha adorned—a festival of heaven. The eye and the heart were ravished by her most intimate parts, swelling plumpy, adorned, with a girdle,—that most splendid gift on the altar of love's pleasure. With her moist-beauty-marks, laid on (forehead and cheeks) with the juice of flowers from the six seasons of the year, she shone, like another goddess of happiness and beauty, in loveliness, splendour, brightness and

glory. All wrapped she was in a dark garment, like the water-laden cloud, her face like unto the moon, her glorious brows like two bows of the bowman, her thighs like elephant's trunks, her hands tender as young shoots. Ravana rose, under the spell of love's arrows, took her by the hand as she walked, and spoke to the shy one, as he smiled : 'Wither away, thou with the lovely lips? What happiness art thou seeking of thine own accord? For whom is the sun now rising under which he will enjoy thee? Who will take his fill of the lotus-scented sap of thy mouth, tasting like nectar? To whose breast will these swelling, shining, close-set breasts of thine, like unto golden goblets, grant their touch? Who will now mount thy broad secret parts, like unto a golden wheel, and decked with a gold band, and which are embodied heaven?'

The *Mahabharat* not only carries this tradition forward, but provides many more and far more elaborate pen-portraits of celestial and terrestrial females. Here is a description of the celebrated *apsara*, Urvashi, the same who became once the beloved of a mortal, King Pururavas. She had been fired with a hot love for Arjun, who was on a visit to Indr's heaven, and bathing and adoring herself, "when the moon had risen and early night had come, the broad-hipped one went forth and sought out the house of Pritha's son. Shining in her soft, curly, long hair wherein she wore many jasmine flowers, the heart-breaker went her way. With the moon of her countenance, and the delight of the movements of its brows, and the sweetness of the words tripping from her mouth, with her charm and her soft loveliness, she seemed to be challenging the moon as she walked along. As she went along, her breasts scented with a heavenly salve, black-nippled, rubbed with heaven's sandal-wood, and shining from her necklace, were shaken up and down. Through the upborne burden of her breasts, and the sharp movements of them she was bowed down at every step, she with the surpassing splendour of the centre of her body, gloriously girdled around by the three folds. Below shimmered, spread out like a mountain, swelling on high like a hill-side, the place of the temple of the god of love, ringed by dazzling splendour, adorned by the girdle's band, tempting with heart-stirrings even the divine Rishis, the faultless seat of shame, wrapped in thin garb. Her feet, in which the ankles were deep imbedded, and whose toes made red and long-stretched expanses glittered, being hung with small bells, and arched like the turtle's back. Her appearance was made still more captivating by her having partaken of heady drink, and by her contented joy by the love within her, and by her various sweet wiles. With Siddhas, Charanas, and Gandharvas, the coquettish beauty went along, even in heaven, of a truth, where there are many wonders, a figure right worthy of remark, with her thinnest of upper garments that shimmered with the colours of the clouds, and like unto the slender sickle of the moon in the sky, as it rides along, wrapped in clouds."

And like her, right worthy of remark on earth, is Draupadi, that great lady of the same epic. Indeed, she is one of the most celebrated models of womanly beauty in ancient India. She has all the marks of beauty which were to form the essentials of the feminine ideal : "Three things in her are deep (voice, understanding,

and navel), six high-arched (nose, eyes, ears, nails, breasts, the joint of the neck), five red (the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, the corners of the eyes, the tongue, the nails)." Glowing with loveliness, exuding a scent as of the blue lotus which could be smelt from a *krosha's* distance, "she is of course without compare on earth for beauty, like a maiden of the gods, like a wonderful apparition". Whoever sees her folds his hands in reverence for such beauty cannot but receive instant recognition, will dazzle even those who are themselves beautiful and used to seeing the beautiful. That is why, when she came in disguise to Sudeshna, the wife of king Virat, and offered herself as a servant, the Queen doubted whether so much beauty was compatible with her professed occupation and said : "You might indeed be the mistress of servants, both male and female. Your heels are not prominent, and your thighs touch each other. You have great intelligence, your navel is deep, and your words are well-chosen. And your great-toes, bosoms and hips and torso and toe-nails and palms of your hands and the soles of your feet and your face are ruddy. And your speech is sweet, even as the voice of a swan. And your hair is beautiful, your bosoms shapely, and you are possessed of the highest grace ; and like a Kashmirean mare, you are furnished with every auspicious mark. Your eye-lashes are beautifully bent, your lip is like the ruddy gourd. Your waist is slender, and the lines of your neck are like those upon a conchshell. And your veins are scarcely visible. Indeed, your countenance is like the full moon, your eyes resemble the petals of the autumnal lotus, and your body is fragrant like the lotus itself. Surely in beauty you resemble Sri herself, whose seat is the autumnal lotus. Tell me beautiful damsel, who thou art ! Thou canst never be a maidservant. Art thou a Yakshi, a goddess, a Gandharvi, or an Apsara ? Art thou the daughter of a celestial, or art thou a Nagini ? Art thou the guardian goddess of some city, a Vidyadhara, or Kinnari, or art thou Rohini herself ?.. For the man thou lookest on there is no more weakness, no more pain, no more weariness, no discomfiture, no sorrow, and no torment. Sickness and old age, hunger and thirst, for him are done with to whom thou givest thyself in love. Were such a one even dead, and didst thou clasp him with thy lovely arms, then would he come back again to life." Indeed, she is so beautiful that "even the women gaze only at her ; the trees seem to stand bowing before her ; no man can see her without being held by love". Naturally, Kichak, the villainous brother of the queen, longs for her and says to her : "Who in the whole world must not fall under the sway of love, when he beholds the glorious moon of thy countenance, endowed with peerless splendour, along with the moonbeams of the smile in thine eyes and lashes, and decked with heaven's beams, ravishing by its heavenly sweetness ? Thy two so glorious breasts, fit for a string of pearls, these well-shaped, splendid, plump, rounded breasts, set close to one another with no gap between, like unto lotus-buds, O thou with the lovely brows, thou with the sweet smile, goad me like the love god's own goads. So soon as I see that waist of thine, sweetly ringed by folds, bent by the breast's weight, and within the compass of the fingers, O thou slim one, and thy lovely secret parts, rising like a river-island, I am carried away by a love-sickness beyond cure."

There are countless descriptions of this kind sprinkled all over the Indian literary tradition. In addition, literature—poetry, drama, *Purans*, and the *ras-shastrs*—contains lists and inventories galore of the charms of lovely women and the marks of beauty. Differing here and there in some detail or item, these were broadly the same and helped evolve the norms and ideals which held good across the ages. Therefore even as the sculptor, guided by the descriptions of the deity given in the *shastrs*, was ultimately required to produce the image from *dhyan*, concentrated imagination, so in the case of these sculptures of the female species there were, so to speak, detailed canonical texts. He was conversant with legends and myths and theories and concepts, and having had proper training understood how to wield the chisel in this matter as well as in respect of other themes. He knew the difference between the spiritual beauty of a goddess like Parvati, and the sensual attraction of an *apsara*, or between the innocent loveliness of a young damsel, chaste and as yet untasted, and the coquetry of an accomplished courtesan.

Possessing the keener sensibility of the artistic mind, the sculptors must have had an instinctive understanding of the infinite shades and nuances which had gone, during thousands of years, into the development of the Indian ideals of, and attitude to, woman. Since we inherit the racial consciousness, the long and complicated history of the rise and fall and resurgence of the female in Indian society, all the pros and cons of her nectar-poison charm, should have come to the sculptors of Khajuraho as a simple formula, even as it comes to the modern Indian. For that matter, there is a fair amount of uniformity in all climes and cultures regarding the view that woman is all a man's good, and all his woe, too. The Hindu had lost little time in finding out the duality and contrariness inherent in woman's nature, which is emphasised in the stories he made up to explain her first appearance, even as stories all the world over do. He knew as well as the Persian poet that in fashioning her the Creator "took a rose, a lily, a dove, a serpent, a little honey, a dead-sea apple, and a handful of clay", and the amalgam became woman. That she was a dish for the gods as well as the devil's ally, was nectar and poison, sweet and bitter, all at once, was well known. As on all other matters, the early Hindu philosophers had lavished much thought on this also; and since the subject was that great bundle of contradictions, woman, the result has been a jumble which could yield whatever view one wanted to extract from that miscellany. In his celebrated study of sexual life in ancient India, Meyer comments : "In the soul of the Indian there dwells that twin pair, burning sensuality and stark renunciation of the world and the flesh. What a delight and torment then must woman be to him ! And since he is wont to express his impressions and views with great violence, has no fear of any deduction and drives everything to its utmost end, we might put together a more than gigantic folio on woman from Indian literature, whose various parts would only have this in common : their contradiction of one another."[8] This, of course, is equally true of any literature anywhere, on this subject, yet, somehow, in Hindu thought the conflict appeared to have started early and was not resolved for quite some time, and even then not for all time, for it still obtains,

basically, in the Hindu view of life. However that be, it is from very early times in Indian history that evidence of woman's dual role in man's life might be traced. Indeed, her greatness is more than allowed—she was man's half, spiritually, also, for no sacrifice, *yagya*, was complete without her; and where women were honoured, the gods came to live. The chaste wife was a highly idealised figure. And Sita and Savitri, and Gandhari and Draupadi, Damayanti and Shakuntala were specimens of the species who do credit to the highest concept ever, and anywhere, of womankind. Of them, indeed, one might say that they bear out the views that "Nature meant woman to be her masterpiece," that "next to God we are indebted to woman, first for life itself, and then for making it worth living", that woman "may have got us out of Eden, but as a compensation she makes the earth very pleasant". Recognising the enjoyment of married bliss as an essential element of life, and the begetting of sons as a religious obligation, Hindu thought sanctioned for woman due and honourable place in the social set-up. On comparatively easier ground, the charm of her youth and beauty was freely acknowledged, the delight of sexual union with her fully accepted. Thus the sight of lovely damsels was regarded as auspicious,—nay to see women, any woman, was considered as generally lucky—and the pleasures of love were often exalted and equated to the highest spiritual bliss. Bhartari Hari was to put it in his verse later; but this always held good: "What use is there in talking a great deal of nonsense and incoherent prattle? There are only two things worth the devotion of man in this world: either the youth of beautiful women who are ever eager to taste sensual enjoyments, annoyed as it were, with the burden of their full-developed breasts, or the forest (hermit's life)". Or, again, "you should either go to the Ganga and take your abode on her pious banks quite capable of purifying your soul of all previous sins, or you should devote yourself to the charming breasts of young women adorned with beautiful necklaces." Again and again, and yet again, is this sentiment voiced in ancient verse and prose, in religious literature and secular, and woven inextricably into the texture of the Indian mind through precept and practice, through the arts and the laws. Whether philosophy and religion were pressed into service for the justification of what was plain and simple hedonism, or whether the surprising development of the cult of pleasure into a creed of purity, of the worship of the sensual into a system of virtue, was subtle truth and sincere realisation,—this is an intricate matter, and one which deserves, and will receive, due notice in the chapters that follow. But it is obvious that the germ of the philosophy of delight, as well as of the worship of woman as Shakti, was latent in the male consciousness and only awaiting ripeness and fruition. Woman-born, and woman-bewitched, man, Ferdinand or Caliban, has always been doomed and destined to worship this second divinity on the enchanted island—Earth! Or why should the gods have made woman at all?

To revert, while a fortunate Krishn sported with thousands of women, there were saints and sages and recluses who having renounced the pleasures of life would take to penance unparalleled and austerities untold. And always they had but two fears: of their sacrifices being disturbed and defiled by evil spirits, and of their vow of

celibacy being undone by a woman. Thus arose and developed the concept of woman as snare, as illusion, as a drag, as an enemy, as an obstacle in man's reaching out to perfection and salvation ! Knowing that she was the greatest weakness of man, the gods kept a bevy of the most captivating females to hinder the aggregation, through austerities, of spiritual power by whoever seemed to be threatening them most. So a Menaka would be sent to a sage like Vishvamitr or Rambha and Tillottama to seduce the *asur* brothers, Shumbh and Nishumbh. For other predicaments too, the solution would be found in the exercise of this most potent of charms. For instance, when the gods were hard pressed by the demon Tarak Parvati was made use of so that she and Shiv might beget a son who would deal with their tormentor Indeed, at one crucial stage in the eternal conflict between the gods and the demons, Vishnu had taken on the form of Mohini, the enchantress, to bewitch and beguile the truce-bound foes. The scene is the end of the great churning of the ocean, which was now yielding not only the prime prize, nectar, but many other priceless items including those

> *"Delicious girls of heaven whose beauties ease*
> *The labour of the battle-weary gods,"*

those daughters of pleasure, the joys of dance and song, the *apsaras* themselves :

> *"And first*
> *Out of the waters rose the sacred Cow,*
> *God-worshipped Surabhi, eternal fountain*
> *Of milk and offerings of butter ; next,*
> *While holy Siddhas wondered at the sight,*
> *With eyes all rolling, Varuni uprose,*
> *Goddess of wine. Then from the whirlpool sprang*
> *Fair Parijata, tree of Paradise, delight*
> *Of heavenly maidens, with its fragrant blossoms*
> *Perfuming the whole world. The Apsarases,*
> *Troop of celestial nymphs, matchless in grace,*
> *Perfect in loveliness, were next produced.*
> *Then from the sea uprose the cool-rayed moon,*
> *Which Maha-deva seized ; terrific poison*
> *Next issued from the waters ; this the snake-gods*
> *Claimed as their own. Then, seated on a lotus,*
> *Beauty's bright goddess, peerless Sri, arose*
> *Out of the waves , and with her, robed in white,*
> *Came forth Dhanwantari, the god's physician,*
> *High in his hand he bore the cup of nectar—*
> *Life-giving draught—longed for by gods and demons.*
> *Then had the demons forcibly borne off*
> *The cup, and drained the precious beverage,*
> *Had not the mighty Vishnu interposed.*
> *Bewildering them he gave it to the gods..."*

And how did the great Vishnu bewilder the demons ? By assuming the form of the beautiful, bewitching Mohini. "As soon as Dhanwantari appeared with the bowl of ambrosia, the gods and the Asuras left the churning rope and madly rushed toward the physician. In the scuffle, the Asuras succeeded in seizing the bowl, and they made away with it. But a quarrel broke out among the asuras themselves on the question as to who should be served first. Then appeared in their midst a damsel of celestial beauty, with her face like a lotus in bloom, heaving breasts, waist like an island, and her person adorned with necklaces, bangles and anklets. She stepped merrily into the midst of the Asuras, her anklets jingling and smiled sweetly on them. The Asuras now forgot all about ambrosia and stood wondering at the beauty of Mohini...and a gallant Asura suggested that she should decide how to share the ambrosia, and all the Asuras cheered him. Mohini smiled and asked them whether it would be prudent to leave such a momentous decision to a woman. 'Wise men have said', said Mohini with a mischievous smile, 'that women are unreliable'. All the Asuras laughed heartily and were now convinced without any doubt that she could be trusted and swore that they would abide by her decision unconditionally. Mohini then remarked that the gods and the Asuras had toiled equally hard in raising the ambrosia and should get an equal share, and made them sit in two rows. She took the bowl and served the row of gods first. After the last god had been served, Mohini disappeared with the bowl !"

It might be remarked, in passing, that even Shiv was dazzled by the beauteous form and going to Vishnu's heaven requested his compeer to incarnate himself as Mohini yet once again. When Vishnu did that, Mahadev was enamoured all over again to the extent of desiring union. But that is another story.

Such, then, was the sweet-terrific aspect of the female, such the deadly lure of her loveliness. She was the eternal siren, singing men to their doom, deluding them as *maya*, symbolising the sensual *par excellence,* and exercising a fatal fascination which would keep mortals bound to the material. It was as this, as sweet enchantress, as a snare, as an instrument of infatuation, as the link and the tie of wordly attachment, that woman struck the fine sensibility of the Buddh. Renouncing wife and child, possessions and pleasures, he went into the wide world and thence into the wilderness that he might receive enlightenment. As is well known, one bout of the final phase of his struggle with the Evil Tempter, Mar, is concerned with this very aspect of man's weakness. The celebrated temptations of the Buddh by the glittering and dazzling daughters of Mar constitutes a familiar motif in Buddhist art. The three girls, Tanha, Rati, and Rag, representing the triple thread of desire which tight-ties all men, and reduces infinite souls to the level of clay puppets, danced before the great ascetic, but all in vain. Mar had lost ground already, but had persevered. In the words of Coomaraswamy : "Then Mara was abashed. But he did not withdraw, for he hoped to accomplish by another means what he could not effect by force ; he summoned his three daughters, Tanha, Rati, and Raga, and they danced before the Bodhisatta like the swaying branches of a young leafy tree, using all the arts of seduction known to beautiful women. Again they offered him the lordship

of the earth, and the companionship of beautiful girls : they appealed to him with songs of season of spring, and exhibited their supernatural beauty and grace. But the Bodhisatta's heart was not in the least moved, and he answered :

*"Pleasure is brief as a flash of lightning*
*Or like an Autumn shower, only for a moment...*
*Why should I then covet the pleasures you speak of?*
*I see your bodies are full of all impurity :*
*Birth and death, sickness and age are yours.*
*I seek the highest prize, hard to attain by men—*
*The true and constant wisdom of the wise."*[9]

This antithesis of woman and wisdom, this view of the seeing eye detecting the flaw behind the facade, the sorrow lurking in the sensual, the canker in the rose, was emphasised by the Buddh again and again. Indeed, regarding women, he seems to have had a generally low opinion : "Women are soon angered, Ananda ; women are full of passion, Ananda ; women are envious, Ananda ; women are stupid, Ananda. That is the reason, Ananda, that the cause, why women have no place in public assemblies, do not carry on a business, and do not earn their living by any profession." The *Jataks* or birth-stories of Gautam tell the same tale "Unfathomably deep, like a fish's course in the water, is the character of women, robbers with many artifices, with whom truth is hard to find, to whom a lie is like the truth and the truth is like a lie ..No heed should be paid either to their likes or to their dislikes."

No wonder, then, that, holding such views, the Buddh had, at first, ruled out their admission into the Order. Even when, after persistent persuasion, he did agree to let them in because, in truth, he could not deny their competence to attain to the fruit of *Nirvan* he had done so with great misgivings. Strict rules of conduct were formulated for the nuns, yet he had dismal forebodings as to the consequences : "Ananda, if women had not been permitted to go forth from the home unto the homeless life under the Norm-Discipline set forth by the Tathagata, then would the righteous life last long, the Good Norm would last, Ananda, a thousand years. But now, Ananda, since women have been permitted to go forth from the home unto the homeless life.. not for long will the righteous life prevail ; only for five hundred years, Ananda, will the Good Norm stand fast.

"Just as, Ananda, whatsoever families have many women and few men are easily molested by robbers.. even so, Ananda, under whatsoever Norm-Discipline women-folk get permission to wander from the home up to the homeless life, not for long does that righteous life prevail.

"Just as, Ananda,...when the mildew falls upon a blooming paddy-field, that paddy-field does not last for long, even so, Ananda, under whatsoever Norm-Discipline women-folk get permission to wander forth from the home up to the homeless life, not for long does that righteous life prevail."

Commenting on such a stern and unemotional approach, Coomaraswamy says : "We must understand that the Early Buddhist want of sympathy with women is not a

unique phenomenon, but rather one that is typical of monastic sentiment all the world over. It is based on fear. For of all the snares of the senses which Ignorance sets before the unwary, the most insidious, the most dangerous, the most attractive, is woman."[10] But, explanations and justifications apart, the early Buddhist view of the matter was very deeply coloured by the Buddh's insistence on guarding against this snare of snares: woman. When Anand had asked: "Master, how shall we behave before women?"—He had answered: "You should shun their gaze, Ananda".—"But if we see them, master, what then are we to do?"—"Not speak to them, Ananda."—"But if we do speak to them, what then?"—"Then you must watch over yourselves, Ananda". The *Visuddhi Magga* would therefore give the excellent tip contained in the following: "Reverend Sir, have you seen a woman pass this way?" And the elder said:

*"Was it a woman or a man*
*That passed this way? I cannot tell.*
*But this I know, a set of bones*
*Is travelling upon this road."*

But Tathagats or no Tathagats, Nature was not going to shut up her workshop. And she continued to see to it that these sets of bones had fine flesh covering them, and life and lustre, and a strangely potent pull. Very soon a reaction set in. Entering as nuns, the female members of the Order were found to be but women, and the narrow way was speedily converted into a broader one, akin almost to the primrose path, not of dalliance, but of salvation through dalliance! Either as cause or consequence of this shift in the view, or as both, the elaborate philosophy and the complex thought of the Mahayan branch of the Faith came out with an extremely reoriented concept of woman, as of many other matters. New goddesses were created as Shaktis of the Buddhs, like those of the Hindu pantheon. Sex and sexual union were re-evaluated and elevated into a road of release, and became a part of the Tantric ritual. On the one hand, legends were fabricated which made the Bodhisattv and the Buddh taste of the pleasures of love; and, on the other, art, which in the earlier phase had shied at representing the Buddh anthropomorphically, began to portray and mould the infinite loveliness of the human form, both male and female. In the realm of the body beautiful of woman, the sculptures at Bharhut and Sanchi, and, more than that, at Mathura and Amravati, and the paintings at Ajanta, reinstated the female of the species in her rightful place in the universe of man. As has been pointed out earlier, by the time the artists at Ajanta came to handle this perennial theme, woman as the goddess of beauty and happiness had come back with full honours. To quote yet once again from the excellent write-up of W. Gladstone Solomon on the subject, "I can think of no parallel to this frank and chivalrous woman-worship of Ajanta. Nowhere else perhaps has woman received such perfect and ungrudging homage. Even the beggar girl who asks for alms in the panel over the portal of the Seventeenth Cave is beautiful. The truth is they could not conceive of woman otherwise. As she truly inspired them so they gave back to her in kind these graphic gifts of a wholehearted admiration. In spite of her obvious reality one

feels at Ajanta that woman is treated not merely as an individual, but as a Principle. She is there not female merely, but the incarnation of all the beautv of the world."[11] In the meantime, ever since the Gupt period, Hinduism had been staging its re-assertion in the land. One of the weapons it had used was to substitute the Puranic pantheon for the Vedic, and to introduce worship of the idol for sacrifice to the fire. In the fashioning of his gods and the modelling of their graces, the Hindu sculptor soon began to outvie the Buddhist, and at Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal, at Mahabalipuram and Ellora, and elsewhere, the Hindu artist succeeded in creating forms of beauty and norms of art which were models as well as inspiration for the generations that followed. And since all art is, or tends to be, one, the tradition that was bequeathed to the Chandel artist was the rich and rare combination of both the Buddhist and the Hindu achievements in the field, and the very quintessence of all that was exquisite and excellent in them. So far as woman was concerned, both Buddhism and Hinduism had vastly upgraded her position, and both now conceived her not only as the incarnation of all the beauty of the world, but also as the incarnation of all the power of the world. As Shakti, she is the manifest world, the seed and source of all the moving and motionless things, is *Prakriti*, the Pure Mirror, in which the *Purush*, the Brahman, contemplates Himself, is the ever-changing *Maya* of the Changeless, is the Relative Becoming of the Absolute Being. The Tantric cult, especially, subscribed to this approach, and the Mother-goddess concept of woman became a major tone in the total colour which has obtained ever since. Woman was again on the pedestal, and regarded purer than ever. The wheel had come full circle, nay more. "Woman is pure in all her limbs, the cow is pure only behind" ; or, "Woman, water and pearls are never spoiled"—thus in earlier thought. Even then she was regarded as the *sansarhetu*, the cause of the universe. But the purity and power associated with her now were of a far higher order, and the view which regarded her as the woe of man, as the sum and essence and root of all evil, was never again to be as strongly held as it was in the pre-Shakt period.

What is more, the goddess, albeit mother, was regarded as an incarnation, no less, of youth and beauty and charm. The power of beauty is acknowledged even by the beasts, and there was no reason why the very incarnation of power should have been lacking in this fine ingredient. Thus, for the Shakt the Great Mother is the " 'unsullied treasure-house of beauty', the sapphire Devi whose slender waist, bending beneath the burden of the ripe fruit of her breasts, swells into jewelled hips heavy with the promise of infinite maternities. Her litanies depict Her physical form from head to foot, celebrating Her hair adorned with flowers and crowned with gems ; Her brow bright as the eighth-day moon ; Her ruby cheeks and coral lips ; teeth like to 'the buds of the sixteen-syllabled *mantra*', and eyebrows curved as are the arches at the gate of the palace of Kamaraja ; Her nose ; Her teeth ; Her chin ; Her arms ; and 'Her twin breasts offered in return for that priceless gem which is the love of Kameshvara' ; Her waist girdled with jewelled bells ; Her smooth and faultless limbs rounded beneath the jewelled disc of the knee like the sapphire-studded quiver of the God of Love', descending in lines of grace to Her bright lotus feet, which dispel the

darkness of Her worshippers. For moonlight is She, yet sunbeam, soothing all those who are burnt by the triple fires of misery."[12] And so, as Lakshmi or Saraswati, as Tara or Triputa, Ganga or Yamuna, or in Her several forms as Shiv's consort, the Goddess became a familiar theme for the sculptor who lavished, even as the poet had done, all his care and craft in evolving an ideal of female beauty which was not sensual but was yet alluring in the extreme, which combined the physical and the spiritual, the human and the divine, clay and spirit, into one grand, harmonious whole.

Thus it came about that by the time the sculptors of Khajuraho were called upon to carve the delightful forms of female beauty which adorn the temples of the place, there were clear-cut conventions to hand about the *apsaras* and the *apsara*-like women, as well as regrading the divinities. On the one hand, there was the young woman with breasts "like a pair of golden gourds" and "hips like the swell of a river bank", the voluptuous female with "the swelling bosoms, rounded hips and clinging serpentine grace of the limbs, typical of the Indian feminine ideal"; and, on the other, the female representation of divine beauty, expressing the highest Indian ideal. Havell's comment on the point is worth quoting : "It is upon spiritual beauty that the Indian artist is always insisting. Purusha, spirit, is the male principle, and the highest type of divine beauty is symbolised by the male figure, beauty of the female divinity being considered as the reflection, or counterpart of the male form. It would be more exact to say that, in the images of Buddha, the Jain Tirthankaras, Indian artists were aiming at a divine type which combined all the physical perfections of male and female, and transcended them both. The broad shoulders and lion-like body were derived from masculine characteristics, and the rounded limbs, smooth skin without veins, the joints with the bones hardly showing, represented those of the other sex. Afterwards, when Mahayan Buddhism provided Buddha with a female counterpart, Indian artists made the new type of divinity conform to the original divine ideal, only adding the most prominent sexual characteristics to distinguish it from the other. Thus was created the ideal super-woman The sexual characteristics became more prominent in Hindu female divinities, such as Parvati and Lakshmi, and in their Buddhist counterparts, the different manifestations of Tara."[13]

Yet the spiritual element of the sculptured goddesses is so much in evidence that nothing ever lowers the dignity of the divine female. The average Western mind accepts with reluctance the charm-incarnate sculpture of the various goddesses, and is positively flabbergasted at the sight of these divinities in the mood of love. But the true admirer discerns no vulgarity, no besmirching, no flaw in the moon-purity of their holiness. Witness, for instance, the remarks of K.M. Munshi on one Khajuraho image of Har-Gauri : "The pose of Shiva and Parvati is conventional. But in this image, conventions have only provided a framework ; within it, the masterfulness of Shiva and the devotion of Parvati have been worked with rare delicacy. Shiva is straight-limbed, suppleness in every line ; Parvati is plump with heavy rounded breasts but her rounded curves are faultless in their grace. The faces of both the god and

the goddess are rare marvels of sensitive chiselling. The subdued smile of Shiva, the Lord of creation and destruction, shows the happiness of one who has transcended pleasure and pain and yet is joyous. Parvati glows with impatient ardour. The eagerness of her surrender sublimated by consuming love is on her face. She is not a passionate *yakshi*, nor the elegant and attractive *apsaras*. This Parvati is dominated by a chaste sensuousness which sweetness has transformed into something eternally feminine and divinely beautiful."[14]

The conventions about the carving of the female include two more. Both these have been already touched upon in the chapter on sculpture, but they deserve notice again, and one of these needs further elaboration. The first is the convention about the nude or the semi-nude. This need not detain us beyond saying that the representation of the female in the nude or the near-nude should not be taken as the prevailing fashion and mode of dress and apparel. The second relates to the fact that only the youthful grace the walls of the temples. Varied are the poses and many the moods of the chiselled beauties, but there is one thing common to them all: they are all young. Goddess, *apsara* or *nayika*—they all glow with the glory of youth; their beauty and form are youth-infused and youth-brightened. In the case of the goddesses and the *apsaras* this is understandable for, being divine, they enjoy youth everlasting. But the human females ? For one thing, Indian art has kept to the joyous and the beautiful throughout, to the songs and smiles of existence, and usually ignored the grievous and the ugly. But apart from that, religion recognised that young damsels were auspicious . They turn the evil eye, and in them dwells Shri, the goddess of wealth and beauty. If these sculptured women are the *devdasis* dedicated to the service of the deity, surely it stands to reason that they had to be the pick of the basket. One does not offer to the deity flowers that are faded and withered, but those which are, in bloom and perfume, the very finest. Since motherhood is the fairest calling of woman and since Nature decks her to perfection for this supreme function in the years of her youth, the ideal representation came to be associated with the young and just-matured damsel, when she tastes like "the god-like draught of immortality", holds forth the promise of supreme pleasure, and is pleasant to look at however she may stand; when there is music in every movement she makes, and art in all her gestures ! After all, Nature has to keep in view all the Buddhs and the would-be- Buddhs, all the monks and the misogynists who would care not a rap if the work of the world came to a stop. Indeed, one modern misogynist, seeing through this clever ruse of Dame Nature, puts the matter squarely :

"With young girls Nature seems to have had in view what, in the language of the drama, is called *a coup de theatre*. For a few years she dowers them with a wealth of beauty and is lavish in her gift of charm, at the expense of the rest of their life, in order that during those years they may capture the fantasy of some man to such a degree that he is hurried into undertaking the honourable care of them, in some form or other, as long as they live—a step for which there would not appear to be any sufficient warranty if reason only directed his thoughts. Accordingly Nature has equipped women, as she does all her creatures, with the

weapons and implements requisite for the safeguarding of her existence, and for just as long as it is necessary for her to have them. Here, as elsewhere, Nature proceeds with her usual economy; for just as the female ant, after fecundation, loses her wings, which are then superfluous, nay, actually a danger to the business of breeding; so, after giving birth to one or two children, a woman generally loses her beauty; probably, indeed, for similar reasons.

"And so we find that young girls, in their hearts, look upon domestic affairs or work of any kind as of secondary importance, if not actually as a mere jest. The only business that really claims their earnest attention is love, making conquests, and everything concerned with this—dress, dancing and so on."[15]

That is it. That is what seems to be the concern of all these young girls who sport so superbly on the facades of the Khajuraho temples, making conquests. Whether they be looking into a mirror, or painting their feet, adjusting a tress or removing a thorn, throwing a ball or touching their breast, putting vermilion in the parting of their hair or applying collyrium, tying the *ghungroos* or merely yawning—they seem to have but one business: to be beautiful and seductive. The artist has caught them at their freshest, in the springtime of their being, when every woman is an *apsara*, while the wine of youth filleth the chalice of the body, for soon the dazzling form will become a bundle of bones and will be disfigured with sagging skin. Touched by the wand of art, the moment has become eternity and we see them still, as young and warm and beautiful as when the sculptor chiselled them:

> *"For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,*
> *For ever panting, and for ever young;*
> *All breathing human passion far above,*
> *That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,*
> *A burning forehead, and a parching tongue."*

And verily they seem to proclaim, with apologies to John Keats, that

> *"Beauty is Youth, Youth Beauty',—that is all*
> *Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."*

so it were best to

> *"Take the cash in hand and waive the rest,"*

and to follow the wise poet's advice:

> *"Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,*
> *Old Time is still a-flying:*
> *And this same flower that smiles to-day,*
> *Tomorrow will be adying...*
> *That age is best which is the first,*
> *When youth and blood are warmer;*
> *But being spent, the worse, and worst*
> *Times, still succeed the former."*

Philosophy of hedonism and counsel of pleasure? No, the sculptor was probably not thinking of anything of the kind. Trained to chisel, he was following the directions of the master, carrying out the instructions of the *shastrs*, conforming to conventions.

No more. For it is known that detailed and elaborate codes had been framed in respect of all these matters. It was known clearly that young damsels should be carved upon the temple walls, even as certain gods or *mithuns* were to be represented. And it was set down with equal clearness what types those women would be, and in what postures and which moods. One manual mentions the rule dealing with the feminine beauties on temple walls :

> "*Alasa torna mugdha manini dal malika*
> *Padmagandha darpan ach vinyasa dhyan karshuta*
> *Ketki bharna (divya) matri muri*
> *Thathaivyacha chamra gunthna (mukhya) nartaki shuksarika*
> *Nupur padika ramya mardla chati shobhna*
> *Etani shodsham ya alasa mukhya jayte.*"[16]

"In sixteen moods and poses—with the hands (arms) arched, with fingers on chin, with fingers on lip, holding the branch of a tree, with one hand holding a flower, the other on hair ; arranging hair, holding a mirror, hiding the front i.e. displaying the back ; dancing ; with a bird ; putting on or taking off anklets ; playing upon the *mridang* ; yawning, mother and child, with a fly—whirl, playing among flowers", mainly : but there are many more, obviously. The ritual of the toilet, playing with the ball, just being beautiful, to say nothing of the smiles and the kisses and the acts of love—there is no end to the variations on this theme, of the wiles of the eternal enchantress !

# 8

# Things Humanity Hides Away

*I sit in the shade of the Temple walls,*
*Above, half seen, in the lofty gloom,*
*Strange works of a long dead people loom,*
*Obscene and savage and half effaced—*
*An elephant hunt, a musicians' feast—*
*And curious matings of man and beast ;*
*What did they mean to the men who are long since dust ?*

THE GARDEN OF KAM : LAURENCE HOPE

It is well known that one of the more important points about the temples of Khajuraho is their erotic sculpture. In fact, for quite a number of people who have little enthusiasm for art or architecture, this constitutes their sole interest. To a very large extent, therefore, the recent meteoric rise of Khajuraho's fame may be attributed to the frank, vivid, uninhibited and unashamed portrayal of innumerable postures of pleasure on temple after temple. Of course, many of these sculptures are exquisitely carved and, as we shall see, there may be much meaning in this display of "things humanity hides away". All the same, there is no denying that on the walls of these sanctuaries there is eroticism galore. Cupid is rampant there with a zest and gusto rarely to be met with even in India where there are many other temples with similar ornamentation. Passion, now hot and fierce and glowing-red , and, again, of such strange, refined, peace-exuding vintage that it is more akin to the spiritual than to the sensual, informs many a carving on many a wall. The sex-crazy, the libido-haunted, the lust-ridden, the id-mongers, priests of the flesh, votaries of desire, slaves of the senses, artists of the bed, lovers of the body, coitus-cravers—all these will find here a veritable paradise of sexual poses and acts of love. Almost everywhere the carven stone vibrates with an amazingly life-like sensuality. The puritan will be shocked at all this vulgarity—and on temple walls ! The priest will offer interpreta-

tions. The philosopher will be intrigued and ask why, why and why, again? For, really, the artists seem to be luxuriating in handling the theme. There is such a rich variety and such a number of these loose loves that if it is a message in code, which is being conveyed, the text is bound to be fairly elaborate and complicated. In any case, whether we exult and wonder or feel disgusted, thrill to the perfection in chiselling or experience a sense of challenge as to the mystery behind the symbol, hurl curses at the men who made these strange weird pictures or give thanks to those who preserved them and to those who continue to have the sanity, in the teeth of much misinformed self-righteousness and conceited criticism, to keep them intact, or again, finally, whether we accept the handiwork of others without comment and question, and merely appraise this part of it at its face value even as we do the rest of the architecture or sculpture—this is all a matter of personal reaction, of temperaments. Probably Khajuraho has known all these reactions amongst its countless visitors, has encountered all these temperaments ! We shall think with the philosopher and talk to the priest in later chapters. Here, let us take note only of the fact, and of the figures, of "these rioting twisted, figures of love and lust," of men and women and beasts, and of gods and goddesses and denizens of the several worlds, who kiss and embrace, press and copulate, with such joy in the doing, and in such an unending diversity of poses that to many critics the portrayal seems to be an illustration of such celebrated works on the *ars amoris* as the *Kamsutr*, the *Ratirahasya* or the *Anangrang*. The ancient Indians had a fully elaborated science of erotics, or the art of love, and there was little prudery or inhibition in the matter of knowledge and mastery in this field. The texts were not only regarded as respectable reading but formed an essential part of the education of well-bred people, both ladies and gentlemen. The gift of life, and of youth and beauty, and of the delights of the senses—these are valuable things, and God made them all and blessed us with these that we might seek and receive all legitimate enjoyment and pleasure upon earth. Just as the modern mind, of the scientist as well as of the social educationist, is discovering the value of the right knowledge of the mystery of sex and the right way of ordering our sexual life, even so did the ancient Indians think that right knowledge of such an important element of our being would lead to right practice which would, in turn, lead to health and happiness and long life, even salvation ; and that, in the neglect of this science, in clumsy bungling of this art, lay danger and disease and dissatisfaction and death. As in other spheres, in this one of erotics, too, the masters seem to have gloried in exact and minute classifications and exhaustive and complex categorisations. For instance, an author like Vatsyayan divides the union between man and woman into seven hundred and twenty-nine varieties ! These are derived as permutations and combinations of types of men and women and the categories of dimensions (of parts), intensity of pleasure, duration of coitus, and so on and so forth. Again, there are various stages of the union. One list enumerates eight of these, viz., embracing, kissing, marking with nails, marking with teeth, uniting in congress, shrieking and crying, the woman assuming the role of the man, and oral congress. And each of these is supposed to have eight sub-divisions, thus

giving the familiar number, sixty-four, of the *chaturshashti*—sixty-four–arts. There are varieties of kisses with such delightful names as the nominal kiss, the throbbing kiss, the touching kiss, the straight kiss, the slanting kiss, the turned kiss, the pressing kiss, the pure kiss and the tongue kiss, the kiss of the upper lip, the clasping kiss,—all for the lips and the mouth, besides the four, which are bestowed on other parts of the body. These are the *sam* (balanced) given on the joints of the thighs, the sides and the chest; the *pidit* (forcible) which is imprinted on the bosoms, the cheeks and the navel; the *archit* (highly touching)—which is meant for the breasts and the sides; and the *mridu* (gentle or affectionate) which is bestowed on the forehead and the eyes. And all this does not exhaust the list. For there is still the *chalitak* kiss which is a woman's kiss in certain situations, and the *pratibodhak* which is a man's, and then there is the sweet-poetic *chhaya-chumban* —"when a man, in order to indicate his rising passion, attempts to kiss the woman's reflection in a looking glass, or in the water or on the wall." What is more, one must know all about these infinite and subtle differentiations, of the demonstrative kisses and the instrumental, for "every lover must reciprocate the beloved's gesture with equal intensity, kiss by kiss and embrace by embrace."[1]

The point of all this is that this whole field of knowledge had been so extensively and intensively cultivated that to the connoisseur it is a delight to wander through the maze of literature on the subject or to gaze in wonder at the wealth of its sculptural portrayal. To the prude, alas, and to the pervert, the matter may strike altogether differently; and certainly, in some cases, one might say that the rule followed seems to have been that nothing succeeds like excess! Without doubt, one is reminded of the *kamasans;* and one cannot but mark, even if one desists from deploring, the utter vulgarity of some of the postures, the mad, bad banality, the glaring depravity of the carvings. A recent traveller remarked about such work on one temple: "Their voluptuous bodies are immensely appealing. The sculptures are all more or less erotic, but the Kali Devi temple seems to be entirely devoted to the arts of love-making. There is no conceivable position of the actual moment of union that is not portrayed . I have to admit that gazing up at them does make one's pulse beat quicker .." Indeed the effect was stimulating enough to make him recall a couplet:

*The organs of sex aud the circlet of bones,*
*And the loose loves carved on the temple of stones.*

which he thought "must, anyway, have been written about Khajuraho." Loose loves, indeed! The same writer observes in what reads like a relished description . "One man to three women seems to be the general theme...In one of the panels the man is shown standing on his head facing towards you, two women stand, one on each side of him, also facing outward, while a third, with her back towards you, has lifted herself and is clasped on to his pelvis. The man's legs are wrapped round her, his feet in the small of her back. Her arms rest on the two other women's shoulders. Thus poised she must work herself and her partner to their climax. The man, although passive, excites the woman on each side of him with his hands. Some of the panels are portrayed with humour. In one of them, for instance, the woman

is bending over while the man takes her from behind. This shocks the two female attendants, who have covered their eyes so as not to see what is happening. And this is but one temple, and only a couple of carvings. There are several more temples with frieze after erotic frieze and hundreds of variations or repetitions in this vein. 'Love has a thousand postures,' said Ovid, and at Khajuraho you may discover as many."[2]

Discover ! The word is peculiarly inappropriate. For these postures relating to the game of love are concealed in no shady nooks and dark corners of this wonder-land of love-making. On the contrary, large and big, and repeated, as if the sculptor were proving to himself and to the world that what he could create once he could carve again as easily, they occupy prominent middle panels of the facades. Vicious and shameless poses, carnal as carnal can be—and yet notwithstanding all the madness and badness of it all, an air of serenity, an aura of sanctity, distinct and unmistakable, envelops the entire work. The impression is certainly not that of a gay prince's palace gallery, decorated and ornamented for debauchery and orgies or for royal pursuits of dubious purpose—though explanations are given of all this being an attempt to recreate the trappings which obtain in the heavens of the gods whose abode the temples are. Somehow, the shock for such prudes who are shocked at such things, or the pleasure for such people who find pleasure in such portrayal, is not as intense as one might have expected. The very fact that all this sordid-seeming, vulgar-looking stuff has been put there deliberately, frankly, freely, and without the least shadow of inhibition or attempt at concealment or apology, somehow robs it of all stink and foul odour. Soon, too soon, one is lost in admiring the sculpture and the purity of line and the line of grace which the stone has preserved. The superb artistry of the carver as such, whatever the theme and motif, claims all the attention, and calls for applause. Nor does one get out of this reverie of reverence for the beauty of the work to fall into any fit of irreverence for the subjects of the sculptor. Rather, one is stupefied yet once again into wondering at this conundrum of loose loves carved on temple walls, this enigma of enigmas. Sex is, under all conditions, mystery enough. That this universe, mysterious in its own right, should merge with that other universe, of religion; that the night-life of Paris and Tokyo, and adventures in paradises like that of Hawaii and thrills offered in the nakedest establishments catering and pandering to the carnal passions of men and women, should adorn, with cheerful nonchalance, the holy walls of sacred sanctuaries, makes for a puzzle and a riddle for which one is likely to find no easy solutions. But of all this, a little later. For the present, let us get back to the nameless, shameless carvings and curvings of the meetings and matings of flesh and flesh.

Of these, the multiformity is indeed amazing. It does seem like a whole book of something, whether the poses of the *Kamsutr*, or of the subtle secrets of some sacred science carved in code, or, again, of the dogmas in graphic representation of some creed like that of the Tantriks and the Shakts—one cannot say, or, at any rate, one need not stop to decide about that here. But there can be little doubt about the thoroughness of the job, of the meticulous care taken to cover the entire

range and gamut of the sexual symphony. Our modern Kinseys, Ellises and Freuds are not likely to miss any of the known categories, natural or unnatural, moral, immoral or amoral, of the sexual behaviour of the species ! The straight and the natural couplings, variations of the *Venus obversa*, are there, of course, and by the score. Some of these radiate, as we shall see, a balance of passion and calm which is as remarkable in the idea as it is in its plastic rendering. But even under this classification there are figures with fire in their loins, so that their limbs seem racked with sea-storms of desire, and their poses portray earthquakes of passion and the very thunder and lightning of lust ! Then there are all the other patterns of the kaleidoscope of sex, so much so that a recent edition of Vatsyayan's *Kamsutr* has, for its illustrations, relied to a very large extent on Khajuraho's sculptures, even as the *Kama Kala* of a well-known author did ! And certainly no study of the erotic art of India could afford to leave out that which Khajuraho offers. Nay, it would have to willy-nilly draw generously on the rich resources of these temples in this field. Konark alone might be regarded as a really serious rival and, by some, as artistically superior; although, in respect of the theme-coverage, Khajuraho will prove to be equally well, if not better, stocked.

It is not necessary here to go into a detailed examination of these erotic sculptures some of which will, in any case, receive attention and comment under "Notes on Plates." But let us give a little more thought to the general position *vis-a-vis* these obscenities, these figures of "grossly indecent character" as Fergusson styles them, which disfigure the sculptural decoration. We have already noticed that every conceivable pose of the actual moment of union has been portrayed. That is one side of the representation : detailed, stage-by-stage delineation of the love-act. Another line of treatment undertakes to show all possible patterns and forms that carnal craving may express itself in. There one may see plastic renderings of fellatio and cunnilinctus, masturbation and mixoscopia, frottage and pedicatio, uranism and narcissism, and all the so-called deviations, aberrations, perversions, all the methods of exploiting the primary as well as the secondary centres of sexual sensation and excitation. Apart from portraying the expression of what is known as the complete normal sexual impulse, the panels and friezes offer a wide selection of the several variations of the impulses of contrectation and tumescence and detumescence.[3] In addition, there are group-orgies and scenes of collective love-making seemingly as wild and vile as wild and vile can be. All this creates a situation which may be summed up as follows. If, in the context of religion, all sex is to be regarded as dirt and filth, then there can be little doubt that more than a handful of that is deliberately flung into the face of the spectator, so that there is no mistaking the intention. And if the issue of religion is ignored, there is still questionable stuff to take note of ; for even within the field of sex that which is commonly accepted as obscene, and will be adjudged so irrespective of the scene of representation, is liberally ladled out.

Of course, the researches and efforts of the psychologists of sex have now succeeded in re-evaluating the abnormal and perverse, and the educated and the enlightened among the men of today are not easily upset by apparent departures from

the norm. To quote about the foremost of such scientists, Havelock Ellis, "...these phenomena are essentially normal. Many of them are commonly spoken of as 'perversions'. In so far, however, as they are aids to tumescence, they must be regarded as coming within the range of normal variation. They may be considered unesthetic, but that is another matter. It has, moreover, to be remembered that esthetic values are changed under the influence of sexual emotion ; from the lover's point of view, many things are beautiful which are unbeautiful from the point of view of him who is not a lover, and, the greater the degree to which the lover is swayed by his passion, the greater the extent to which his normal esthetic standard is liable to be modified. From the non-sexual standpoint, indeed, the whole process of sex may be considered unesthetic, except the earlier stages of tumescence." Or again, " . with regard to posture in coitus, it is sometimes assumed that there is only one right, proper, and normal posture with the feminine partner supine and that any other posture is unnatural, if not indeed 'vicious'. That is a mistake. The custom most usual in one particular phase in human history, or among one particular race, is not to be taken as a rule for other times and other peoples. The oldest picture of coitus we possess—of the paleolithic Solutrian age and found in Dordogne—represents the man as supine while the woman squats. At the present time many different customs as regards postures prevail among different peoples, and many peoples admit various postures. Van de Velde remarks, as regards Europeans, that husbands seldom realise that the monotony of the marriage-bed—if such it is found to be—may be relieved by variations that come within the normal range ; and even if they do realize this possibility they often put it indignantly aside as 'licentious'.

"There is, indeed, more than this to be said. In many cases it may merely be a question of selecting an agreeable variation...Taking sexual relationship in the widest sense, but still on the physical side, it is important always to bear in mind that whatever gives satisfaction and relief to both parties is good and right, and even in the best sense normal, provided (as is not likely to happen in sound and healthy persons) no injury is effected. Fellatio and cunnilinctus (the impulse to either of which frequently arises spontaneously in men and women who never heard of such practices) are perhaps the chief of these contacts."[4]

Looked at in that way, all might have seemed well—but for the factor of religion. Bang comes the thought that all this is put on temple walls, on edifices which should breathe holiness, should dazzle us not with the immoral lustre of scarlet lusts, but, rather, with the white radiance of purity, with the light of chastity. That is why the immediate reaction of most people is a sense, if not of revulsion, certainly of mild shock, veiled condemnation, and blushing embarrassment. That experienced, some offer an explanation which is more akin to apology, others come out with a spirited defence, but many move on and try to forget ; only a very few attempt to figure it out, and usually fail or they fall into the trap of some sugar-coated interpretation which is more soothing than convincing. A random sampling of opinion will illustrate this range of recoiling and rejoicing reactions. The view of one traveller has been quoted already. Another like traveller, looking at India in

a general way, is confronted by the phenomenon and remarks : "A little more questionable, especially for young ladies under twenty, is a visit to one of the famous temples on whose walls the sculptors have set a monument to the art of love of their day. It is left to the spectator whether he wishes to see in this unending series of variations of embrace a symbol of tantric yoga or of plain obscenity. True, at Khajuraho—which is reached in a day's drive from Banaras—the ceremonial solemnity almost entirely banishes all association with natural love-play. At Konarak, on the other hand, a temple situated in the magnificent solitude of the eastern coast, the artist's fantasy had clearly been more strongly influenced by down-to-earth reality ; indeed, his frieze constitutes an almost complete manual for would-be courtesans. But even here there is not for a single moment any suggestion of vulgarity. The faces of the men and women are rapt in bliss in a way that makes the activity of their bodies seem no more than an expression of a profound divine longing."[5]

Registering more expert opinion, Havell was unequivocal when he said "The decorative sculpture on the temples at Khajuraho (and elsewhere) is sometimes grossly obscene" , but, in fairness, he had warned the Europeans against being misled into forming a wrong judgement of the ethics of Hindu religion. He believed that these indecent representations had to do with the depraved ritualistics of some sects, and that they were introduced on account of the popular belief that it was a protection against the evil eye. Yet another point made by him was this : "There must naturally be a different outlook in sexual matters among a community which regards marriage at an early age as a social and religious duty than there is in Europe, where it is usually deferred to much later in life and where a considerable proportion of both sexes remain celibate. A Vishnu temple was a symbol of the active or dynamic principle of nature, and most of the external sculpture was popular art interpreting vulgar notions of the philosophic concept, but not implying any moral depravity."[6]

Havell's view and approach are shared by several. The implied condemnation and the defensive argument are echoed by others frequently. Admitting freely that the sculptural ornament at Konark is amazingly beautiful, Percy Brown is constrained to add : "Yet much of this relief work depicts subjects which, according to the ordinary accepted standard in such matters, are grossly obscene. These indicate the emergence of a particular phase of Hinduism, known as Tantrism, the *maithuna* ritual of which is represented in the carving on this temple . It is not improbable that this temple was erected on such a remote site in order that the practices so wantonly illustrated might be ceremoniously conducted by its addicts in an underworld of their own. The ultimate result was the same as that which has overtaken other races who have abandoned themselves to such unnatural pursuits. Konark is deserted...The congregating of a number of temples on one site is not uncommon in India, but an assembly on such a scale as those at Khajuraho implies some special object. It seems not improbable that a powerful hierarchy which then existed conceived the idea of founding a central seat of religious life and learning, not monastic...But as at Konark in Orissa, it is proved by the carvings on several of these temples, that the

same sinister ritual which degraded that monumental conception also prevailed at Khajuraho."[7] Likewise, R.L. Mitra, who is justly renowned for his monumental work, *Antiquities of Orissa*, has little praise for this part of the sculptures but explains the phenomenon at length. Under the heading 'Obscenity', he writes : "In describing the merits of Orissan Art I must not forget to notice the despicable taste which the artists have displayed by making some of their figures most disgustingly obscene. By this I do not refer to their nudity, for, as justly observed by Professor Lubke, 'the task of sculpture is to conceive man in the full natural beauty. Hence the nude figure in its strictest sense is required. The perfect harmony and beauty of the whole can only be displayed in the unclothed form'. This canon has been more or less accepted by artists and men of taste in every age and clime, and the Uriyas have rather evinced a true sense of the proper sphere of sculpture by chiselling the nude, and not thereby given offence to good taste. But they have added thereto certain licentious representations which do not admit of description. Their number is small, and they by no means enter into the general scheme of ornamentation of the temples ; but there they are ; and their existence cannot but offer a violent shock to all modern sense of propriety and decency. I enquired of many learned pandits at Puri, as to why such offensive figures have been allowed to desecrate the sanctuary of the Divinity ; but they could tell me nothing worth hearing. In one instance obscenity in a temple has been accounted for on the supposition of its being expiatory. In a note on Kajraha with reference to Rashid-ud-din's mention of that town, Sir Henry Elliot states that 'in the *Prithviraj Rayasa* mention is made of a Brahman woman, Hemavati by name, who had committed a little *faux pas* with the moon in human shape, and, as a self-imposed punishment for her indiscretion, held a Banda jag, a part of which ceremony consists in sculpturing indecent representations on the walls of temples, and holding up one's foibles to the disgust and ridicule of the world.' The story occurs in the Ist Canto of the Benares MS. of Cand, and in Mr. Growse's translation of it, mention is made of the Bhandava sacrifice, but without any allusion to indecent representations on temples, and I can nowhere find a description of the ceremony in any Sanskrit work. Possibly there may be some authority for it, and the obscenity on Hemavati's temple at Kharjinpur or Kajraha might be accounted for on the supposition that she wished to expiate her fault by a disgustingly public confession. But it is scarcely to be supposed that all the principal sculptured temples of Orissa owe their indecent ornaments to a like cause, and I am disposed to think that the explanation is more ingenious than true. It is much more probable that the indecent figures on the old Central Indian temples were due to the same cause which produced them in Orissa. What that cause was, it is difficult now to say with perfect certainty. A vitiated taste aided by general prevalence of immorality might at first sight appear to be the most likely one , but I cannot believe that libidinousness, however depraved, would even think of selecting fanes dedicated to the worship of God, as the most appropriate for its manifestation ; for it is worthy of remark that they occur almost exclusively on temples and their attached porches, and never on enclosing walls,

gateways, and other non-religious structures...I am induced to believe that the offensive figures are due to a desire to typify religious ideas and not to an inherent vicious taste in the artists or their employers. It was not 'to incite, excite, or gratify the lower feelings of the public', 'to lower art to unworthy purposes by objectionable representations', but to symbolize a religious idea, that the offensive sculptures were carved ; and this was done without any perception of their offensive character. This is the more apparent in the circumstance of all the ornaments being chaste, and their disposition thoroughly artistic."[8]

Some other Indian writers are more positive and emphatic. "*Mithuna* subjects", writes Dr. Ray, "have never been taboo in Indian Art, and a creative sensuousness has ever been regarded as an important source of energy, of vital urge in life...in certain schools and aspects of Indian *sadhana*. Sanchi and Amaravati knew it, Mathura was more than conscious about it, and in the Ellora scene of Siva and Parvati in rapturous yet self-forgetful kissing embrace, the *mithuna* idea of this *sadhana* finds a most creative expression...The temples of Orissa and Khajuraho show the extent reached by Indian craftsmen in giving concrete form to this very subtle and complex view of life...(and though) the sensuous love of, and joy in, the human body...may have been due to Tantrik inspiration, it is not necessary, in the light of the interpretation set forth above, to explain the erotic scenes and scenes of sexual acts by referring them to Tantrik practices."[9] K.M. Munshi faces the issue boldly and rebukes critics roundly : "The amorous carvings on the walls of Indian temples have often evoked the wrath of the critics of Indian art, and human confidence in its own judgment being what it is, such criticism is natural. I must, however, enter a caveat against people of one generation, brought up with its own standard of taste, sitting in judgment on the taste of another generation, a different age or a different social or aesthetic tradition. There is no universal criterion of taste or delicacy of all things at all times. Such critics are apt to forget that ascetics strictly pledged to life-long celibacy and ardent reformers preaching high moral principles have never, in the past, protested against what is now termed as 'obscence representation'.

"Is it not possible that these sculptures possess a significance which has been lost to us ? Would it not be better to assume that the masters, who carved these sculptural wonders, did not realise that their masterpieces would be looked at by those to whom the beauty of the human body would no longer be divine ; to whom the natural would not be admirable ; to whom universal creativeness could not be presented without evoking lewdness."[10]

With equal exuberance, Mulk Raj Anand lashes out at "the shocked indignation of the present day puritans". On this point he writes emphatically both in his monograph on Khajuraho, as well as the larger book, *Kama-Kala*. We must remember", says he, "that from the Vedic period onwards, the belief in the universe as the outcome of the cosmic union between the male and the female had been a fundamental aspect of the Hindu faith. And, from the *Atharva Veda* downwards, hundreds of texts had been written on the elaboration of the play function of sex

within the scheme admitted by Hindu religion. The *Kama Sutra* of Vatsyayana was only a later recension of previous erotic literature. In the highly charged poetry of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti, the warm sensuality of an age, which knew the quick of the sun and the warmth of human desire, had sunk into the consciousness of the well-to-do nobility and the intelligentsia. The full life, for some at least, was, presumably, the familiar back-ground of existence rather than the aberration which it seems today. That nothing is alone in Nature but must merge with its counterpart to find perfection in Union, being the accepted religious practice, there may have been cults which permitted the initiation of young virgins in the tendernesses of conjugal love...There is nowhere among the surviving erotic reliefs of Khajuraho any vulgarity if one brings to the sculptures the warmth of the heart rather than the cold stare of obscene enquiry or the furtive gaze of a later, more cynical and weary age."[11]

Nowhere ! Not so for M. Fouchet, who has this to say on the point in his study of the erotic sculpture of India : "Official authorities are modest when they describe this art as 'sensual'. For the truth is, 'sensuality' is linked with such obvious representation of the sexual act that the word seems lame and often ill-placed. The bas-reliefs, at Khajuraho and Konarak, despite the feverish fantasy of certain postures, are too realistic to be dismissed. The British were well aware of this and often tried to turn tourists away from these places. .

"Should we always pass over the realism of these bas-reliefs and consider their symbolic meaning only ? Are they in fact always symbols of spiritual union and divine creation ? Many would have it so, but it seems to us preferable to make a distinction between those reliefs where charm of form suggests the idea of Release, and others where it would be difficult, if not impossible, to see more than a representation of the most earthly pleasures."

To illustrate the point he takes up first a sculpture from Khajuraho which shows "Vishnu's exquisite wooing of Lakshmi," notices the "tenderness of the faces and their serene meditation", and remarks, "Nothing here but speaks of supreme harmony. Here is the veritable *mithuna* · sensual union imaging mystic union." Then he examines a frieze decorating the base of the temple of Lakshman in which no trace is found "of the harmony, the sure detachment, the grace even of the other work. Here, from right to left, eroticism is crudely paraded in a succession of scenes. Copulation, sodomy, fellatio, fondling and titillation are elaborated in a frieze of carnal pleasure, a gallery of postures, a triumphant orgy."[12]

This distinction between *mithun* and *mithun* is stressed by some Indian critics also. Here is, for example, O.C. Gangoli : "More embarrassing are the large number of loving couples with emphatic sexual significance. Their presence on the facades of sacred temples of worship have provoked severe criticism and controversies which have never been satisfactorily answered before thé writer had discovered a passage in the text of the *silpa-sastra* relating to the building of temples. This text...for the first time justified the presence of erotic couples on the facades of the temples. This text purports to record an obligatory injunction on builders of temples

to depict the effigy of 'productive couples' on the last band of the temple decorations...No philosophical or esoteric explanation of the reason for the injunction is to be found in the texts of the *silpa-sastras*...The logical or mystical explanation for the introduction of *mithunas* on temples of worship has to be sought in philosophical and religious treatises beginning from the *Upanisads*. It should be pointed out that this embarrassing symbolical effigy—illustrates the mystic unity of *Purusa* and *Prakriti*—the Male and Female principles—as one of the fundamental doctrines of the *Upanisads*—the principle of Unity in Duality,—for, the 'Two are One'. The effigy occurs not only on the facades of Hindu-Brahminical temples—but also on Buddhist shrines from very early times." But even "if the effigies", he continues, "of emphatically erotic intent on the sacred temples can be justified on canonical, erotic, and philosophical reasons—the question still remains—to what extent the presentation of the symbolical unity in the Duality—in forms in which the *Two become One*, can be permitted without offending against our sense of propriety and decorum. While there are numerous presentations of the productive couple (both in Orissa and at Khajuraho),—which do not transgress the limits of decorum there are, unfortunately—several manners of presentation of the theme—which appear severely to strain our sense of propriety and notions of purity."[13]

Thus confronted, the average visitor, the Indian generally and the Westerner especially, is bound to be a little confused. Among the latter even competent critics like Roger Fry seek the explanation, like Havell, in the theory that the Indian's approach to the subject is all his own : "Now the Indian is one of the most completely anti-rationalist civilizations that has ever existed. Their vast synthetic religious system, seem to us to treat with sublime indifference the antinomies of logical destruction. They refuse altogether to analyse and distinguish. They can reconcile entities that to us seem contradictory or opposed. And their art seems to bear this out. What we should regard as gross sensuality may be to them a constituent of the highest spiritual condition, and crude erotic representation may fitly be employed in temples to the purest abstractions of divinity. The Hindus must in these respects appear to us, and indeed have appeared to many other peoples, among the most enigmatic people in the world, and it is not surprising therefore that their art is difficult of access to the Western mind in most respects."[14]

Let us add, by way of rounding off this array of comment and criticism, an exposition of the philosophy of the *mithun* given by another European, M. Ramback: "(This) union of phallus and matrix represents the union of Shiva and his goddess, of Sky and Earth, of Day and Night...In all ancient traditions the godhead appears under a double aspect, male and female...In India the male is the personification of the passive aspect, the female of active energy. The male represents eternity, the female the moment, the power of Time...The male aspect has its counterpart in the creation of every man, the female aspect in the creation of every woman. The most usual way of representing the antagonistic but complementary elements of the Absolute is based on the duality of sex. The union of man and woman symbolized the sexual dualism of the deity and the image of this union evoked the divine

unity." And further, "Western art has always glorified the body of the man or the body of the woman on its own ; Indian art glorifies the two together...No other art so serenely expresses the eternal harmony between man and woman."[15]

A charming comment and most flattering to Indian art; only art had little to do with this glorification of the two together. In India, art was not a separate entity, and the artist, or rather, and more accurately, the craftsman, was merely carrying out canonical behests and injunctions which religion and philosophy had propounded and formulated. In any case, for work on buildings the artists have usually fallen in line with the prevailing ideas and philosophies of their own times. The phenomena called "art" and the "individual artist" are of comparatively recent growth. Generally speaking, the "artists have always been the chroniclers of the society in and by which they have lived. They represented society and knew that they did. Their art has never been used for championing protests or claims, but for giving expression to the lofty spiritual aspirations of their compatriots. Artists have always taken it for granted that they should form part of society."[16] For India, of the Middle Ages in particular, this was wholly true, so that no credit, nor discredit goes to the artists for translating the erotic into sculptural form. In so far as the image beautiful has been created, or the job well done, they would deserve commendation ; but the thematic part of the representation belongs to the domain of religion and philosophy and it is the priest and the seer who have to be answering questions and dispelling doubts.

Obviously, the issue is not as simple and straight as it appeared on first acquaintance. Actually, this puzzle of the passions, this riddle of romance in holy precincts, this erotic engima, requires much deeper analysis and examination and far more of explanation and interpretation than we can attempt within the scope of this volume. Even so, let us make an effort to probe into the mystery, and to marshal systematically the clues which are offered and the directions given for threading one's way through this labyrinth of loves, through this maze of mystic matings. But before we proceed to that task in the next chapter, may we quote a paragraph *apropos* this theme from the present writer's book, *Holy Cities of India*. This would serve as a sort of summary of the matter as well as a warning to tread warily, for the ground is, indeed, treacherous :

"To begin with, one may concede that, whatever the motive, lewd and lustful sculpture carved on temple walls is to be condemned, obviously, and one need not waste too many words on that aspect of the matter. There is a limit and a point in the art and philosophy of love beyond which lie things which humanity hides away. And if this is true of the day-to-day, rough-and-ready morality, how much more objectionable would such representation of the naked and the lurid, of 'curious matings of man and beast', of the symphony of the 'sex-act' in every conceivable note, of all the play and poses of passion, of depravity and obscenity, abnormality and perversion, be to religion ! Yet, all this will not cancel the fact that such sculpture does cover innumerable surfaces of scores of temples all over the country ; and, what is more, covers them in no uncertain, self-conscious, shame-faced,

apologetic, or, even, defiant manner. This is no approach of 'by your leave', 'I'll dare you', 'to hell with your morality', of an adolescent exploring secret crevices of a womby world. Oh, no. The utter frankness and abandon, the zest and the joy, the perfection of workmanship and the amazing beauty of the faces and figures, the evident delight in their making, and the sanction of large-sized reproductions, in wide spaces, in endless variety, and inexhaustible variations flashing from the most prominent panels which the bright light of the sun cannot but illuminate—why, all this must be the work either of mad people, of a society utterly degraded, or there must be reasons, and justifications, for all this, a sense and meaning, some religious philosophy, behind all this. One cannot dismiss it all as the hurried and mischievous coal-and-chalk scribble of a schoolboy. And, equally, one need not be too hasty in condemning all this as wholesale depravity. In fact, one cannot do this for the simple reason that much of the *mithuna* sculpture is superb art, is such exquisite and delicious carving that there is hardly any trace of the consciousness that this has anything to do with sex. The spiritual bliss, the beatific expression, the joy of inter-merging, of being one and not two, of reaching a stage where each is both—all that has been caught by the chisel with surpassing excellence, and only the crudest mind will see in those representations anything but beauty ; the evil would lie in the eye of such beholders themselves. Indeed, such work might be more than justified by the oft-accepted philosophy that *mithun* is a way to liberation, is *sadhana*; that the union of male and female is symbolic of the divine, that *bhog* is *yog*, that the sensual and the spiritual are two aspects of the same substance, and that, as Walt Whitman puts it, "the soul is not more than the body." On the other hand, the 'loose loves', the vulgar carvings, too carnal to be clean, and too often, bad works of art, might be the result of Tantrik or similar influences and practices which were such a dominating trend of the medieval religious beliefs. All the same, let us, the men of this age, who pride ourselves on our broad-minded acceptance of the facts of life, who insist upon explaining it all to our teenagers lest they should suffer from ignorance, who allow the sex-appeal to operate upon such a mass scale through word and picture, through our books and films—let us not be squeamish nor petty in our appreciation of these sculptures."[17]

# 9

# The Erotic Enigma

*I am the poet of the body and I am the poet of the soul*
*The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me*
*I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,*
*And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man .*
*I have said that the soul is not more than the body,*
*And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,*
*And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is .*

SONG OF MYSELF WALT WHITMAN

THE problem posed by the presence of erotic sculptures on the walls of temples at Khajuraho or elsewhere may be broken up into three distinct sub-divisions. First, there is the generally accepted antithesis between the body and the soul, the common belief that the so-called passions are our worst enemies, that man fell from grace when Eve, herself beguiled by the devil, had made Adam eat the forbidden fruit. Arising from the above, our social ethics is built around the dogma that we should desist from indulgence and practise chastity and self-control. Therefore, our preachers incessantly cry up the wares called the soul and cry down the goods called the flesh. They exhort us to choose the way of God, narrow and sharp like the razor's edge, rather than take the easy and broad road, that primrose path of dalliance which leads to the everlasting bonfires of hell. From this point of view, anyone portraying, publishing and putting forth anywhere material, whether sculpture, painting, poetry or prose, which is calculated to inflame and incite the passions and to add fuel to the fire of our desires, is obviously guilty. The second of our divisions of the subject relates to this last, for these loose sculptures of Khajuraho cannot but be regarded as "obscene". They are frank and provocative in the extreme, and will be straightaway ranked as "the forbidden", defined or undefined. Even the tentative model code drafted by the American Law Institute would, *prima facie*, cover and

indict these, though, on presentation of interpretations and defence, Khajuraho might escape with a warning. Finally there is the "horrid" fact that these shameful things are placed, and placed so prominently, daring the sun and hiding naught, on the facades of religious edifices. In a way, this was a stroke of genius, a truly bold move, for nothing but religion could have had the courage and the compass to absorb these lewd representations. A royal palace might have carried such ornamentation for the personal titillation of a debased and debauched king, but, other than that, no civic architecture could have flaunted the seemingly vicious and indecent in such wise, so openly, and without the least trace of self-consciousness or hint at apology. Yes, not in the name of art, nor of beauty, but only in the name of truth and holiness, has it been possible to do this. After all, it is the ocean alone, as some poet says somewhere, which can accommodate the desert ! Desperate remedies for desperate ills ! Cure of the soul through the senses ? No, rather the Great welcoming its equal, the Whole inviting the Part to return and dwell in the Primal, proclaiming as it were, with Shelley ,

*"The One remains, the many change aud pass*
*Heaven's light for ever shifts, Earth's shadows fly,*
*Life, like a dome of many coloured glass,*
*Stains the white radiance of Eternity."*[1]

Then death tramples it to fragments, which flow and merge back into the One to re-emerge as hues of the earth's shadows. But to all this we will return. Here let us only take note of the importance of this third and crowning element of the phenomenon : that it is the temple, the house of god, that highlights this seemingly scandalous sculpture. And thereby is raised a hue and cry which, impotent to pull down the plaster, reviles the plastic , or a yea but why which, whether from the level of religious acceptance or that of intellectual humility, would still want to know and understand the root and fruit of the matter. To finding these, let us now proceed.

Of the first of our sub-divisions of the subject, one could talk on for ever. Our scriptures and lay literature have endless miles of sermons on this score. There is prose and poetry enough to drown any sensible thinking on the theme, and we are told, again and again, how the pure spirit gets caged in this cottage of clay, our vile body, which is subject to all the ills of the flesh, to lust and decay and sorrow, disease and sin and death. Our sages and saints, recluses and philosophers, our lights and leaders, have spoken ceaselessly, in all times and climes, of man's great misfortune : the body, its senses and passions. Indeed, by many, life itself has been held as disease and suffering ; no more. The Buddh had declared when he achieved enlightenment :

*"Thro' many a round of birth and death I ran,*
*Nor found the builder that I sought. Life's stream*
*Is birth and death and birth, with sorrow filled.*
*Now, house-builder, thou'rt seen! No more shalt build !*
*Broken are they rafters, split thy beam !"*[2]

His entire approach was that of pity—for life, all life, was pain, and only through

*nirvan*, through ceasing to be, was real escape possible. All else was illusion, because health concealed disease ; youth, old age ; and apparent happiness, like the rose, was fraught with the foul canker of misery. "Birth is suffering", he had said, "Decay is suffering, sickness is suffering, Death is suffering, likewise Sorrow, Grief and Woe, Lamentation and Despair. To be conjoined with things which we dislike, to be separated from things which we like—that also is suffering. Not to get what one wants—that also is suffering. In a word, this body, this fivefold mass which is based on Grasping, that is suffering." And as to the origin of suffering, this is the truth :

"It is that Craving—that leads downwards to birth, along with the Lure and Lust that lingers longingly now here, now there : namely, the Craving for Sensation, the Craving to be born again, the Craving to have done with rebirth.

"And how then may there be the ceasing of suffering ?

"Verily it is the utter passionless cessation of, the giving up, the forsaking, the release from, the absence of longing for the Craving to have done with rebirth also as Craving ?"[3]

Considering that the world has continued merrily to witness generation after generation of men, it appears that, by and large, humanity has not taken the remedy suggested very seriously. On his death-bed Socrates was annoyed to hear the wailing of the women because, for him, in going hence there was no cause for sorrow. Rather, he had requested his disciple Crito to offer a cock to Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, for the disease, his life, was ending. Had he not said to his judges : "But now the time has come to go away. I go to die, and you to live, but which of us goes to the better lot, is known to none but God."[4] One wonders what prevented the old philosopher from putting an end to the "disease" earlier, "with a bare bodkin", as Hamlet was to suggest later. Was it the dilemma in which Hamlet himself was caught, the seesaw of thought and counter-thought :

> *"To be, or not to be · that is the question:*
> *Whether 'tis nobler in in the mind to suffer*
> *The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,*
> *Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,*
> *And by opposing end them ? To die, to sleep,—*
> *No more ; and by a sleep to say we end*
> *The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks*
> *That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation*
> *Devoutly to be wish'd.'*

And did he, Socrates, decide to live on too for the same reasons and fears which Hamlet thought up !

> *"To sleep! perchance to dream! ay, there's the rub ;*
> *For in that sleep of death what dreams may come*
> *When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,*
> *Must give us pause: there's the respect*
> *That makes calamity of so long life ;*
> *For who would bear the whips and scorns of time...*

*When he himself might his quietus make*
*With a bare bodkin?"*[5]

Or, did he realize with D.H. Lawrence that bare bodkins are of little help?

*"Can man his own quietus make*
*with a bare bodkin?*
*With daggers, bodkins, bullets, man can make*
*a bruise or break of exit for his life*
*but is that a quietus, oh tell me, is it quietus?*
*Quietus is the goal of the long jouney*
*the longest journey towards oblivion.*
*Slips out the soul, invisible one, wrapped still*
*in the white shirt of the mind's experiences*
*and folded in the dark-red, unseen*
*mantle of the body's still mortal memories.*
*Frightened and alone, the soul slips out of the house .*
*to find himself on the crowded, arid margins of existence."*[6]

Or, did his wisdom teach the wise old man of Greece the logic on which Iqbal, the Indian poet, relied when advising a would-be suicide? After death, the poet had argued, a man could be as he was when alive, or worse, or better : thirty-three per cent chance for and sixty-six against. Surely it were folly to bet on that kind of horse. Or, was it some far greater law of conscience, tenet of faith, at work? That that which lies not in our gift is not for us to take, that He sendeth forth when He wills and calleth back when He wants. For that matter, why did the Lord Buddh choose to live on after the enlightenment, and refuse to be content with his own *nirvan* while creatures of the world wriggled and writhed in the entanglements of existence? They say that he was but thirty-five or thirty-six when Gautam the Shakyamuni became the Blessed Lord, but he passed not away until he was eighty or thereabouts. He stayed on, in this state of sorrow called life, obviously, to show the path, for he knew that Nature was in no hurry to shut down her workshop, nor were men out to embrace non-existence. No, whatever its hue and texture, whether strife and sorrow, or peace and joy, or a concoction of opposites, life had to be accepted, and all that one could do was to make the most of it.

And so, in spite of the preachers of despair and the philosophers of the dust, men lived on, bungling or blessing existence, as best as they could. Also, since the conditions of existence were not changed, for all the blame apportioned to life, for all the protests and clamour made ; since the "sorry scheme of things" had to be accepted entire, further speculation and injunctions were resorted to. This resulted in the common concept that the life of man was a playground for the gods and the demons, a battle-field where there was incessant fighting between evil forces and good, between the aspirations of the soul and the passions of the body. This last, the abode of the immortal element incarnated in man, was but an instrument to sound the divine harmony upon, was a means to release. And he alone was the true conqueror who subdued his lusts, who did not let his passions rule him. Thus

arose a distinction between good and evil, and, further, between the good and the pleasant. It became customary for every halfpenny twopenny thinker as well as the most towering intellect to advise man to beware of the temptations of the flesh. One has to pick up any compendium of quotations, any collection of poetry or philosophy, any manual of selections from religions of the world, and ten thousand passages would be found which stress this dichotomy, this paring asunder of the whole man into body and soul, into the sensual and the spiritual. In the Hindu scriptures, the distinction is sounded early enough—though not before a very wide, almost-all-embracing basis of thought and philosophy had been propounded which has helped uphold a vast structure of countless beliefs and practices often at variance with one another. One of the most celebrated occasions on which this is put forth is the meeting in *Kath Upnishad* between Nachiketa and Yam (Death). The former would know whether after death, a man is, or is not. And Death is hesitant and says : "Choose sons and grandsons who shall live a hundred years, herds of cattle, elephants, gold, and horses. Choose the wide abode of the earth, and live thyself as many harvests as thou desirest ..choose wealth and long life. Be (king), Nachiketa, on the wide earth. I make thee the enjoyer of all desires. Whatever desires are difficult to attain among mortals ask for them according to thy wish : these fair maidens with their chariots and musical instruments—such are indeed not to be obtained by men—be waited on by them whom I give to thee..."

To which Nachiketa replied, "These things last till tomorrow, O Death, for they wear out this vigour of all the senses. Even the whole of life is short. Keep thou thy horses, keep dance and song for thyself. No man can be made happy by wealth. Shall we possess wealth, when we see thee? Shall we live as long as thou rulest?...What mortal, slowly decaying here below, and knowing, after having approached them, the freedom from decay enjoyed by the immortal, would delight in a long life after he has pondered on the pleasures which arise from beauty and love?"

Then come those great words, so often quoted, which head this wondrous discourse by Death : "The good is one thing, the pleasant another ; these two, having different objects, chain a man. It is well with him who clings to good ; he who chooses the pleasant misses his end. The good and pleasant approach man, the wise goes round about them and distinguishes them. Yea, the wise prefers the good to the pleasant, but the fool chooses the pleasant through greed and avarice. Thou, O Nachiketa, after pondering all pleasures that are or seem delightful, hast dismissed them all. Thou hast not gone into the road that leadeth to wealth, in which many men perish."[7]

But this is only the beginning of such discourses, the last of which might have been heard this morning in any temple, *gurudwara*, church or mosque in India, or, for that matter, in any other house of god, anywhere in the world. The Buddh was to hammer it in again and again and to wean men and women away from the mesh of desires, from the wine of pleasures. For, contrary to what we like to believe, that pain of life is compensated for by pleasure, "pleasure itself is the root

of pain" , and "sorrow springs from the flood of sensual pleasure as soon as the object of sensual desire is removed". Indeed, as Nietzche says, "Pleasure is a form of pain" and "said ye ever yea to one joy? O my friends, then said ye yea also unto all woe". According to the *Dhammapad*, "From merriment cometh sorrow, from merriment cometh fear. Whosoever is free from merriment, for him there is no sorrow; whence should fear come to him? From love cometh sorrow; from love cometh fear, whosoever is free from love, for him there is no sorrow: whence should come fear to him?"

The Buddh was constantly pointing out how from lust one runs to distress, how being attached and devoted to sensual pleasures, and infatuated by desire and blind with delusion, men would people the cemetery again and again. What was needed therefore was to vivify in our minds the wish for enlightment, to aspire to and attain *nirvan*, non-being. The Jain tenets, similar in several respects to the preachings of the Buddh, insisted likewise that pleasures of the senses must be avoided. Sex and woman, both symbols of the keenest of sensual pleasures, were regarded as arch-temptations. The *Sutrs* enjoined upon the votary to vow:

"I renounce all sexual pleasures, either with gods or men or animals. I shall not give way to sensuality, nor cause others to do it, nor consent to it. As long as I live, I confess and blame, repent and exempt myself of these sins, in the thrice threefold way, in mind and speech and body."[8]

The five clauses of this great vow forbade the Jain (Nirgranth) any discussion of topics relating to women. In addition, he was not to regard and contemplate the lovely forms of women, nor recall to his mind the pleasures and amusements he formerly had had with women; nor eat and drink too much, nor take liquors nor eat highly seasoned dishes; nor occupy a bed or couch affected by women, animals or eunuchs. If a Nirgranth did so, he might fall from the law, because of the destruction or disturbance of his peace.

All this engendered a fear, if not of life itself, certainly of all that seemed pleasurable. In Jainism and early Buddhism merriment became taboo, and enjoyment, even innocent enjoyment, a sin. Serenity was the aim, but often it approximated to mere long-faced seriousness of the type which would provoke, from healthy nature and whole men, the retort which Shakespeare's Sir Toby gave to Malvolio: "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" Through a queer somersault, for the Buddhist, cakes and ale came once again to be part of life, nay even of virtue, but like true Christianity Jainism emphasises simplicity, chastity, denial of pleasure, and continence, even today.

Or take the *Geeta*, the Gospel of the Lord, Shri Krishn, in which desires and passions are again and again likened unto wild horses. Here is a passage taken almost at random. Arjun asked: "My Lord! Tell me, what is it that drives a man to sin, even against his will and as if by compulsion?"

Lord Shri Krishn said: "It is desire, it is aversion, born of passion. Desire consumes and corrupts everything. It is man's greatest enemy.

"As fire is shrouded in smoke, a mirror by dust, and a child by the womb, so

is the universe enveloped in desire.

"It is the wise man's constant enemy; it tarnishes the face of wisdom. It is as insatiable as a flame of fire.

"It works through the senses, the mind and the reason; and with their help destroys wisdom and confounds the soul.

"Therefore, O Arjuna! first control thy senses, and then slay desire; for it is full of sin, and is the destroyer of knowledge and of wisdom.

"For the delights born of touch, having beginning and end, are in truth, of pain; O son of Kunti, the enlightened man has no joy in them."[9]

And so, superficially, even the *Geeta* created a distinction between the delights of the senses and the "bliss which sense, and which only the pure intellect can grasp", so that one ought to "renounce every desire which imagination can conceive, and control the senses at every point by the power of mind." It stressed, in short, the practice, or re-stressed the ancient path, of *yog* against *bhog*! Whether, at its worst, as low sensuality, or, even at its best, as being, existing, and experiencing existence, *bhog*, the way of pleasure, was abhorrent. It was to be decried, even in the "high places", even in the "honeyed stage" where they seek to tempt thus: "Sir, will you sit here? This pleasure might prove attractive. This heavenly maiden might prove attractive. This elixir keeps off old age and death. Yonder stand the wishing Trees, which grant the fruits of all desire, and the stream of Heaven, which confers blessedness. These nymphs are incomparable and not prudish. Eyes and ears here become supernal; the body becomes like a diamond .." No, even to such an offer, of staying in a place "high, unfading, ageless, deathless and dear to gods", the yogi must say "no" and ponder upon the defects of pleasure: "Broiled on the horrible coals of the round of rebirths and writhing in the darkness of birth and death, I have only this minute found the lamp of yoga, which makes an end of the obstruction of hindrances, the impairments *(klesha)*. The lust-born gusts of sensual things are the enemies of this lamp. How then may it be that I, who have seen its light, should be led astray by these phenomena of sense—this mere mirage—and make fuel of myself for that same old fire again of the round of rebirths, as it flares anew? Fare ye well, O ye sensual things, deceitful as dreams, and to be desired only by the vile."[10]

And not in India alone, but all over the world, and by other great faiths, too, the same high-faluting tone was adopted. Christianity, in particular, spoke in strident voice against the body. "This I say then", preached Paul, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication uncleanliness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, wrath, emulations, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance : against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." And, "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God ; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."[11]

Once the quarry was started, everybody seemed to join in the hunt. High and low, preacher and poet, state and society, went all out to give this dog, lust, a bad name and to hang it. Most often it was done from hypocrisy, from the desire to conform, or in sheer rhetoric. Himself lust-procreated and woman-born, man found it convenient and somehow soothing to decry both these—and, in practice, to continue to indulge in one and pursue the other. As against spirit in one set of antithetic terms, another, "love", and yet another, "holy wedlock", were created as the virtuous opposite of vicious lust which, poor thing, was denounced even by that sanest of all poets, and one with such a whole and steady view of life, Shakespeare :

*"Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame*
*Is lust in action ; and till action, lust*
*Is perjur'd, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,*
*Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust ;*
*Enjoy'd no sooner but despised straight ;*
*Past reason hunted, and, no sooner had,*
*Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait,*
*On purpose laid to make the taker mad—*
*Mad in pursuit, and in possession so ;*
*Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme ;*
*A bliss in proof, and prov'd a very woe ;*
*Before, a joy propos'd ; behind, a dream.*
*All this the world well knows ; yet none knows well*
*To shun the heaven that leads men to hell."*[12]

And since life is "flesh and blood", what was the worth of life ? We were all sinners, and prayer was our need, prayer for forgiveness that we were "flesh and blood". Such thought and preaching brought about a lasting sense of guilt, of sin, of the flesh as the incarnation of the Devil, and at war, for ever, with the spirit. Life became not a matter of living, as for the birds and the animals, but, for unfortunate man, a matter of striving always towards sinlessness, towards mortifying and chastising one's flesh, towards renunciation. All over it was accepted that the more there was of the creature, the less there would be of God. And though one was, again and again, lured by beauty and tempted by pleasure, and though life appeared to be sweet and worth living, one had to remember that all this was somehow wrong and bad. Sexual pleasure was especially that, for this poison was nectar-sweet, and therefore to be feared most. And woman, beautiful woman, Indr's ally in myriad forms of young and seductive damsels, who could tempt even sages , this Queen of the Kingdom of Flesh, who, alas, was such a haven of delight

for man, such a sweet abode, a wonder and a gift worth losing paradise for,—she had to be withstood, and warded off like a most deadly enemy. Life became vile, beauty wicked, and woman, at her finest, the very personification of these two, was regarded as the weight that pulleth downwards. Sex became synonymous with sin.

This state of affairs has been the rule of our world for thousands of years. Life as pain and burden, woman as vice, sex as sin, pleasure as weakness, indulgence of the senses as fall from grace, striving after the material as something contrary to the dictates and desires of God—this pattern of values has dominated the life of man and coloured his mind for countless centuries. "Affliction", it is written in the *Vishnu Puran,* "is multiplied in thousands of shapes in the progress of conception, birth, decay, disease, death and hell. The tender animal exists in the embryo surrounded by abundant filth...enduring severe pain..." that throughout life until "the agonies of death claim him and he passes away tortured by the servants of the judge of the dead, to undergo a renewal of his sufferings in another body". In the *Markandeya Puran,* Sumati instructs his father : "Mighty is the pain of living in the womb, of being born from a female, of the infancy of one when born and that of decrepitude as well. There is great misery in youth influenced by lust, malice and anger ; old age is also full of miseries and the culmination of this is death. Mighty is the pain of those who are carried away by force by the emissaries of Yama and thrown into hell ; then again is birth in the womb and death and hell." Even for those who go to heaven, "there is incomparable misery, for, from the time of ascension, everyone conceives in his mind, 'I shall fall'. Beholding the people of hell, they attain to mighty misery thinking day and night, 'I shall be brought to this condition". There is, then, no abiding joy in life. All is sorrow and living a heavy pack, no mild yoke. What is more, neither escape nor relief is possible easily, if at all. Man must carry the cross, God alone knows why. Baudelaire saw that, bowed down to the ground, men pass by, and each bears upon his back "a great Chimaera, heavy as a sack of coal, or as the equipment of a foot soldier of Rome. But the monster was no dead weight. With her all powerful and elastic muscles she encircled and oppressed her mount, clawing with two great talons at his breast !" And nobody knows why we continue to live on like that.

Life then became, and has remained, for the majority of mankind, a sorry conflict between flesh and spirit, desire and reason, intoxication and continence, pleasure and prayer, woman and god. Tempted in youth, maddened by lust, unable to say no to the compulsion of the blood, one has what appears to be a good time, like Bhartari Hari had, but all that is a false feeling, is delusion :

> "*When I was ignorant in the dark night of passion*
> *I thought the world completely made of woman ;*
> *But now my eyes are cleansed with the salve of wisdom,*
> *And my clear vision sees only God in everything.*"

Thus was man led astray by religion and piety, philosophy and poetry, and incalculable harm was done to his self and spirit. Dame Morality and Madame Prudery made good use of the handle provided by religion, and countless self-

appointed representatives of God made capital out of this whole body of pernicious dogma. The average human being began to see sorrow in life and filth in beauty ; and in the sparkling ruby of wine, a clouding of the intellect ; and in the fair flowers and fruits of the earth, nothing but the canker and the rot. A time was to come when in so-called civilized societies, sex took on a most morbid hue, and in certain ages, like the Victorian, even the tiniest inkling of the sexual, given by way of word, gesture or association, was regarded as wicked. Prudery was stretched to ridiculous extremes. For instance, it was considered indecent to keep the legs of the sofas and chairs uncovered ! Obviously such a state of things was not tenable and the mind of man devised systems of thought which ruled out much of the validity of the premises stated above. But more than the mind of man, it was his healthy instinct which, in spite of the out-pourings of poets and preachers and the theoretical stands of prudes and moralists, saved him from falling into too great an error, at least, in practice. Henceforward there was recognition, on both sides, of the rights of the flesh as well as of the spirit. To quote Bhartari Hari again,

> *"What is the use of many idle speeches ?*
> *Only two things are worth a man's attention...*
> *The youth of full-breasted women, prone to fresh pleasure,*
> *And the forest."*

God had His claims but so had Eve. Similarly, it was conceded that intoxication was all right ; for the hedonist, of wine or pleasure ; but for the believer, of virtue, of love of God. In a sober system of thought, like that of the Hindus, *kam* was regarded as an essential aim of life as well as *dharm*, duty and piety, or *moksh*, release. Life had to be accepted body and soul ; the human species had to be recognised as consisting not only of men but also of women, even if these latter were nothing but Tilottamas and Rambhas—and these they certainly were not, for woman is not only enchantress, but also mother and helpmate, and sister and friend too. If man could not live with her, he found it equally difficult to live without her. When there is such a powerful conflict in respect of any matter, the usual solution which the ingenious human mind has suggested is a synthesis of the seemingly antithetic. Thus the problem of the cruel choice between *bhog* and *yog* was got over by evolving a philosophy of living, a way of thinking, wherein *bhog* itself became *yog*, enjoyment was made into a form of discipline. Likewise, the dilemma of man versus woman was resolved through conceiving these two as aspects of the same entity, by making one the manifestation of the other and through creating that superb image, the *ardhnarishwar*, half-man-half-woman, Shiv androgynous. In the myths of Shiv and Parvati, and of Krishn and Radha, this great quarrel of all mankind ended, literally, in lovers' meeting. Shiv, *yogi* and householder ; Krishn, Lord of Kurkshetr and Lover of Vrindavan, the propounder of the *Geeta*, as well as the philanderer making merry with the gopis,—these two provided the happy solution of the soul-sex riddle so far as it concerned the Hindu, confused as he was with Budhist thought, and distracted by contrary advice about the

ways and values of life. Normal acceptance of the seasons of life, of its spring and lusty summer no less than the autumn and winter of age and decay, acceptance and fulfilment of the desire for loving as well as of the desire for leaving, for romance as well as renunciation—this became the way. Moderation in all things, in the things of the senses as well as those of the spirit, came to be regarded as the golden rule in almost all religions. Finally, there was the great philosophy of the *mahasukh*, great delight, which in one supreme effort of intellectual thought and spiritual vision, gave to the mind of man a new path of peace, through advocating action in detachment, killing without rancour, doing without desire, lusting without passion, using without a sense of ownership, committing follies without a sense of guilt, drinking without inhibition, indulging in all the sensual pleasures as if one were praying and chanting *mantrs*, and, above all, converting woman into a deity and equating the sexual act with a religious rite. Verily, among other hideous things, lust lay dead, and sin ceased to be ; and everything became godly and clean.

This was not a new development, but a restatement of an ancient truth, a resuscitation of old tenets. Sex was never vile; it had always been worshipped. Woman was never a torment, no shadow of the Devil, but a creature of light and delight made for man's happiness and for life's fulfilment. And Kam was, in many faiths, the first god, was certainly among the first gods. As to the creation of woman, here is a Hindu myth which underscores the *raison d'etre* of this sublimity, stresses that she was conjured into being that she might be the radiance of our life and the joy of our existence :

"In the beginning this (world) was Self alone, in the shape of a person. He looking round saw nothing but his Self. He first said, 'This is I'; therefore he became I by name. Therefore even now, if a man is asked, he first says, 'This is I', and then pronounces the other name which he may have. And because before (purva) all this, he, the Self, burnt down (ush) all evils, therefore he was a person (pur-usha). Verily he who knows this, burns down every one who tries to be before him.

"He feared, and therefore any one who is lonely fears. He thought, 'As there is nothing but myself, why should I fear?' Thence his fear passed away. For what should he have feared? Verily fear arises from a second only.

"But he felt no delight. Therefore a man who is lonely feels no delight. He wished for a second. He was so large as man and wife together. He then made this his Self to fall in two, and thence arose husband and wife...Therefore the void which was there is filled by the wife. He embraced her, and men were born.

"She thought, 'How can he embrace me, after having produced me from himself? I shall hide myself'.

"She then became a cow, the other became a bull and embraced her, and hence cows were born. The one became mare, the other a stallion ; the one a male ass, the other a female ass. He embraced her, and hence one-hoofed animals were born. The one became a she-goat, the other a he-goat ; the one became a ewe, the other ram. He embraced her, and hence goats and sheeps were born. And thus he created

everything that exists in pairs, down to the ants.

"He knew, 'I indeed am this creation, for I created all this.' Hence he became the creation, and he who knows this lives in this his creation".[13]

"This curious and rather crude story of the creation," as Lin Yutang styles it, "contains many germinal ideas of Hinduism", and one or two which are germain to our theme. Woman was created because the Self found no delight without this second. And she was created from within himself as a part which must for ever tend to the condition of union with the other half, with its source and fount, that they may both become one and whole. The union of man and woman therefore becomes the symbol of the union of *Purush* and *Prakriti*, of Creator and Creation, of God and Soul, and is one of the most commonly employed metaphors in religious texts. "As a man in the embrace of his beloved wife foregets everything that is without, everything that is within ; so man, in the embrace of the knowing Self, forgets everything that is without, everything that is within ; for there all desires are satisfied, Self is sole desire."[14] Later on when the concept of *Shakti* was developed, another strand of thought was added to the same idea, and the union of male and female became the symbol of the union of Shiv and Shakti, of God and His manifestation ; or of the Buddh and *pragya*, wisdom, and so on and so forth. Secondly the myth underscores the theological position that all is Self, so that all duality is illusion, all creation is a veil, and only he who understands this, and burns everything that tries to come before him, he who knows that it is all but the play of the "I" with the "I", mere sport of the *Purush*, Primal Person, is wise. As a corollary to all this, the whole question of good and evil, right or wrong, this or that, thine or mine, living or not living, is irrelevant, and has point and meaning only for the ignorant. In any serious system of self-realization, in every discipline of thought and philosophy with which Hinduism is concerned, this concept is of major importance; and though different ways might be suggested and followed, the aim is always identical: it is always to overcome the illusion of duality and to move beyond it into union with the Self. It is immaterial whether we do this through the intellect or the body, through the wine of love or that of thought, through practising severe *yog* or lying for ever in sweet embrace of one's beloved. Realization is all, release is what matters. The paths are different, for men are different and their capacities are different ; otherwise, even the paths themselves are forms of the same illusion !

All this is not as simple and summable as it seems. And centuries of thought and experiment must have gone into the building-up of this whole philosophy. Usually denoted by the epithet "Tantrik" although it belongs to both Vedant and Vaishnavism, this system of religious thought is as complex and elaborate as any other. And it has many divisions and ramifications. Anyway, what we are mainly concerned with is that, for the Hindu, all this is part of the normal religious thought and experience. Except for the prude, and the very "Victorian", the Hindu finds little indecency in the coupling of the sexes. It is not only normal to desire a wife, but to marry is an essential duty, and in the act of copulation naught is to be seen but the act of creation, and the expression of joy of the Self. "Down to the ants,"

and "all the pairs", so the texts say. Therefore in sexual attraction, between god and goddess or between dog and bitch, there is nothing else but the manifestation of the same elemental desire which the myth seeks to emphasise. Other symbolic signification apart, this commonest of interpretations should be enough to clear the sexual, whether in life or literature, or on temple walls as sculpture, of the charge of obscenity and filth. *Kam*, desire, is one of the four aims of man's life ; *kam* is what keeps the world going. Without this god, before whom even the gods are helpless, nothing would be ; and neither birth nor bliss, civilization nor salvation would be possible. What Coleridge says is no mere figure of speech, is not mere rhyming :

*"All thoughts, all passions, all delights,*
*Whatever stirs this mortal frame,*
*All are but ministers of Love,*
*And feed his. sacred flame."*

And if this was penned in the context of the mundane, let us remember that all the religions of the world speak of the union of the human soul with the divine spirit in the same metaphor, speak in language charged with the high emotion of physical love. There is the celebrated example of the *Song of Solomon* :

"The song of songs, which is Solomon's.

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth : for thy love is better than wine. A bundle of myrrh is my wellbeloved unto me ; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts. My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-gedi.

"Behold, thou art fair, my love ; behold, thou art fair ; thou hast doves' eyes. Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant :

"I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.

"I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples : for I am sick of love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

"The voice of my beloved ! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.

"By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth : I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth : I sought him, but I found him not.

"The watchmen that go about the city found me : to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth ?

"It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul

loveth : I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

"I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

"Behold, thou art fair, my love ; behold, thou art fair , thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks : thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead. Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing ; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them. Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely : thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks. Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies."

And again,

"How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter ! the joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman. Thy navel is like a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor. thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins. Thy neck is as a tower of ivory ; thine eyes like the fish pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim : thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus. Thine head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thine head like purple ; the king is held in the galleries.

"How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights! This thy stature is like to a palm tree and thy breasts to clusters of grapes."

The entire imagery of the song is that of the rapture of love, of the kingdom of the flesh, of the body beautiful. Whatever was the intention of the makers of this song, there is no denying that the thought and language flow freely and there is no inhibition or hesitancy in respect of the carnal. As in the case of the Indian counterparts like the *Geet Govind* and many more of that kind, the spiritual in this song is being translated in terms of the physical. The analogy in religion would be worshipping the Invisible, Supreme God, in the form of various idols. The body is the house of the spirit. As the temple of love, it is at once a cage for the soul as well as a door to release. The later puritanic quarrel with the body in the name of the spirit, which for several centuries was to dominate the thought and morals of the world, had little justification so far as the older religious texts were concerned. That, irrespective of associating love with religion, the body does not necessarily belong to rakes, is more than evident even in day-to-day life. Indeed, to many a common person, man or woman, the emotion nearest to ecstasy which they have felt has been available through sexual experience. At certain moments of maximum intensity and desire, the lovers, throughout the ages, have realised that our flesh is from God, that the union of bodies is the union of souls. Our literature from the earliest to the modern times is full of example after beautiful example which could be quoted in support of the above. Lawrence's *Lady*

*Chatterley's Lover*, and even Vladimir Nabakov's *Lolita*, give fair indication of sex as a spark of the supreme being. But exceptionally fine expression of what the Buddhist called *mahasukh*, great delight, is given in Jules Romains' *The Body's Rapture*, and one is tempted to quote extensively from that testament of beauty and body. Here truly is the homage of spirituality to sensuality, the worship of the flesh made spirit. The acts of love are literally acts of idolatory and as one reads through passage after passage, one feels as if one were reading a scripture of the religion of the flesh. Here is a passage about the impact on his feelings of the lover's first look on the breasts of the magnificent body of his beloved.

"I had dropped on my knees in front of her. She saw my glances light on her breasts, with desire and admiration, so beautiful was their outline and their rise and fall. She put her right hand up to her breast. At first that hand remained still, and her breath came short and fast. Then I saw that hand, which in some inexplicable way resembled her face, contract over her breast, crawl a little, hesitate, start off again ; and at last with sudden decision and the suppleness of the hand of a musician, unfasten the neck of the robe, throw back the stuff, and disclose the shoulders. Then, determined not to stop, declining to hesitate, she untied the ribbon which held up her chemise, and helped by a movement of her body, made it slip along her arms at the same time as the robe. Her breasts issued from the frothing stuffs. I was so fearful still of startling her, that I managed to restrain the impulse that urged me towards that magnificent body.

"And as she leant towards me, her hands touching my neck, her wonderful breasts pushing their points out at me, I buried my face in them in an ecstasy of enthusiasm so unegotistical, so impersonal almost, that it became almost an act of worship. I began to circumscribe their volume, to take into myself, to realize profoundly their shape ; I traced out the very sources and least divergences of their outlines with a compact girdle of kisses. Between two such chains of kisses, I passed over the whole of one breast with my tongue ; or I was in urgent haste to surround, suck up their points ; or all my mouth slid rapidly from one breast to the other in the wet track of kisses, and returning, stopped suddenly in the hollow between, pressing and moving over the tender hollow as if to make her breath of life, her blood, gush forth. And all the time I was telling myself that these two lovely breasts of Lucienne, so nobly offered, deserved better ; that my caresses were inadequate, that my kisses and tongueings called from her breast a gratitude too inadequate to satisfy her head and soul.

"I took breath. I drew away my face. And while my hands caressed the flesh that my mouth had left, so that the chill of interrupted caresses might not come between us, I gazed. At moments, in order to remove all obstructions from my eyes, I took away my hands. The two breasts were ample, white with a darker tinge, perfectly moulded, admirably taut. In themselves they were a spectacle I could have gone on contemplating indefinitely. It was as though all haste had gone from me, all desire to possess, that I might be allowed to remain thus, kneeling in front of them, unable to look my full. Surely the most ancient sexual magic was working

up my ecstasy. I cannot believe that any real man is capable of seeing the beautiful naked breasts of a young woman without a feeling of overwhelming astonishment, at once poignant and thrilling, which suspends all his faculties, wipes out every opposing idea, and simplifies the universe remarkably, by substituting, in a halo of dazzling light, these tender twin idols."

Indeed, here, too, one finds the same emphasis on sex as magic, and the sexual act as a spell, which one is so familiar within almost all religious cults. The mystic pull of the flesh, the thrill, the intoxication, the sense of near-worship, nay of worship, which the man feels when he looks at the beautiful body of a woman, or a woman experiences when she looks at the most masculine part of the man, are a matter of wonder only to those who have unfortunately not known all this, or who, through some mistaken and misguided sense of prudery or from uneducated inhibitions have deliberately been their own enemies, so that they have grown rigid and frigid. They have insulted the flesh and regarded the sexual act not as an act of joy and fulfilment but as an act of sin and humiliation. We quote again from *The Body's Rapture*:

"She made me stretch out by her side. She pressed her two hands softly against my head. I felt she was guiding my head below her breasts, that she was inviting me to continue my exploration of her body. While one of her hands rested upon the nape of my neck, directing me from moment to moment with imperceptible pressures, her other hand little by little pushed aside her clothes. Thus I came to her waist, to the nascent curve of her hips and belly. I amused myself by tracing a ring of caresses about it, the turns and twists of which, packed closely, intermingled. My kisses lingered in receding tender regions of flesh. My mouth, my tongue, which unresistingly they welcomed and swallowed almost, seemed to cling there. No effort I felt was needed to imagine that a certain penetration of our bodies had already taken place, and two feeble cries which broke from her, revealed she felt that also.

"The clothes continued to slide away, following my kisses. Was it I who hurried slightly, or was I but obeying Lucienne? Her nudity spread more rapidly, like a brushwood fire when the wind rises. I came to the borders of her most feminine flesh. Already I could sense its perfume, that perfume which has since become as familiar and friendly as her very voice, but which then I breathed for the first time.

"Lucienne pressed my face with her hand as though to beg it to have the strength to move away. I yielded. With a long caress that passed over all her body, gliding over the valley of her breasts, I went to seek her lips.

"While I was prolonging my kiss, she had succeeded finally in throwing off her clothes. I abandoned her lips in order to contemplate her body naked. Its extreme beauty could not surprise me, for it issued from all the ideas I had conceived of it, as a geometric figure from the points that determine it. Of that perfect nudity I had made the necessary mental picture even before my glance could verify it.

"Yet the sight so inspired me, so completely satisfied my spirit with all the joys

of proof, so abundantly fulfilled my state of veneration, that a new and almost furious zeal to caress her took possession of me. But I thought I felt in her the need for a pause. I restrained myself, the better to look at her, the better to caress her only with my eyes. A caress which, perhaps, was more difficult for her to bear bravely than any other. Her body seemed to gather itself together, to hide itself away. Her face turned from me, seeking some refuge. She closed her legs tightly, and hid her belly with her hand. But far from giving way to this fresh attack of modesty, I think she must almost have blamed herself for it as though it were a weakness, a disloyalty to the kingdom of the flesh.

'Look,' she said, forcing her voice somewhat, 'look well at your wife.' 'Do you know,' I said to her, 'that it is not possible to be more beautiful than you.'"

And, as the woman in turn has her experience of the sight and glory of the male body :

"As though in gratitude, or to escape her confusion, she put her arms round my neck and kissed me many times. Then she turned again to my body, multiplying her caresses, as if it was now her turn to acknowledge and venerate. The rites she followed were similar to mine, descending the length of my body as she pushed aside my clothing by degrees.

"But despite my great happiness I felt a certain fear. Would not the sudden sight of male desire, in all its naive brutality, produce on an undoubtedly inexperienced woman, if not a feeling of absurdity—she was too carried away to think of absurdity—at least one of violent, bestial ugliness, which might wake her out of that marvellous intoxication, in which, since yesterday, she had been sunk with me. I wondered whether it would not be wiser, and altogether natural, to give way to an excitement which I had no need to feign, and come to the act of possession with no further delay.

"But this ordeal, besides exciting my sensuality, intrigued me just because of the risk attached to it. I told myself also, that for a mentality like mine, which even in its ravings remained mathematical, such an escape would be equivalent to cheating over the answer to a problem. Since I had followed Lucienne thus far, and with what enthusiasm, in her progressive discoveries in the 'things of the flesh,' was it elegant, in the intellectual sense of the word, to slide out at a critical moment.

"But it was too late now. Lucienne, who had with the same movement both unbared and exposed me, drew back her face. I was infinitely anxious. She had, it is true, not recoiled brusquely, nor turned away her eyes, which on the contrary seemed to have become ardent, and grave. Suddenly she dropped her head against my own, buried her face in the shadow of mine, and whispered in my ear, a whisper which kept all her voice's ardour: 'Husband !'

"I pressed her shoulders to me. She added, speaking very slowly, with much emotion : 'Listen. There are some things which I have never understood but which I understand so well now. You know...I read (yes, one can be chaste and yet have read that sort of thing) that among certain ancient peoples the women adored the male organ and made it an object of worship. And I am not saying

that I was shocked. But for me it was as strange, as buried deep in primitive madnesses as the sacrifice to Moloch in Salammbo. Well—

'Well...' (She buried her face deeper, trembling from top to toe) 'well! I did not know it could be . yes, so beautiful, have such a kind of impatient, terrible beauty. When you gazed at my breasts yesterday, I shall remember the ardour you showed then all my life. And now I feel something equally strong. I resent it in me, not having the courage to bear witness to it as you did...not yet that courage... But I too adore' (the word swelled with all the ardour which issued undulating from her breasts) ..'I am possessed by adoration, like some woman of the past.'

"She was breathless. Her heart was striving with itself. I finished getting off my clothes.

'One kiss at least,' she said.

"Quickly she flung one fearful kiss as at an idol's feet, then threw herself back, drawing me down upon her.

"A drunken cry burst from her throat, a prolonged even burst of sound, half moan, half shriek. It would have sufficed to tear the passion from me, even if my unsurpassable excitement had permitted me to retard it."

Approached from either end, the secular or the spiritual, the *yoni* and the *lingam* are more than symbols. They assume the proportions of reality—even of the Supreme Reality. But to this we shall revert.

In our own sacred writings, there are innumerable examples which could match, nay outmatch, the above. Here is, for instance, a hymn to the *Devi*, the Goddess, Bhubaneshvari :

*"Now I pray for the attainment of all blessings to Bhubaneshvari,*
*The cause and Mother of the world,*
*O Gauri! with all my heart*
*I contemplate Thy form,*
*Beauteous of face,*
*With its weight of hanging hair,*
*With full breasts and rounded slender waist,*
*I remember again and again the dark primeval Devi swayed with passion,*
*Her beauteous face heated and moist with the sweat (of amorous play),*
*O Bhavani! I worship thy body from ankle to knee,*
*Upon which the bull-bannered one gazes with great love,*
*And who, as if not satiated by looking thereon with two eyes,*
*Has yet made for himself a third.*
*I call to mind thy two thighs,*
*Which humble the pride of the trunk of an elephant,*
*And surpass the plaintain-tree in thickness and tenderness.*
*O Mother! youth has fashioned those thighs*
*That they may support as two pillars the weight of thy (great) hips.*
*Looking at thy waist, it would seem as if it had been absorbed*
*And become the great bulk of thy breasts and hips.*

*By the youth which clothes the body with hair,*
*May it ever be resplendent in my heart!*
*O Devi! may I never forget thy navel,*
*As it were a secure inviolate pool,*
*Given to Thee by Thy blooming youth,*
*Filled with the liquid beauty of the beloved of Samara,*
*He who was fearful of the fire from the eyes of Hara.*
*Thy two lotus-like breasts, smeared with sandal,*
*Which bear ashes telling of Shiva's embrace.*
*O Mother! Thy two arms, beauteous with the water*
*Dripping from Thy body bathed from neck to throat,*
*Seem to have been formed by the crocodile-bannered One,*
*As long nooses wherewith to hold the throat of his enemy (Shiva).*
*May I never forget them!*
*O Daughter of the mountain-King,*
*Again and again have I looked upon Thy shapely neck,*
*Which has stolen the beauty of a well-formed shell,*
*And is adorned with pleasing necklace and many another ornament;*
*Yet am I never satiated.*
*O Mother! he has not been born in vain*
*Who oft calls to his mind*
*Thy face, with its large round eyes and noble brow,*
*Its radiant cheeks and smile,*
*The high, straight nose,*
*And lips red as the bimba fruit.*
*Whoever, O Devi! contemplates upon Thy wealth of hair,*
*Lit by the crescent moon,*
*Resembling a swarm of bees hovering over fragrant flowers,*
*Is freed of the ancient fetters which bind him to the world."*

The Goddess is Mother, but there is no inhibition regarding the contemplation of her physical charms. For the initiate the form is only a symbol; and this "gross", physical, aspect of the Goddess is there, like all *murtis*—idols—of the Hindus, to provide help to the common man. As Arthur Avalon explains, "The Devi as Parabrahman is beyond all form and *guna*. The forms of the Mother of the universe are threefold. There is first the Supreme *(para)* form, of which, as the Vishnu Yamala says, 'none know.' There is next Her subtle *(sukshma)* form, which consists of *mantra*. But, as the mind cannot easily settle itself upon that which is formless, She appears as the subject of contemplation in Her third or gross *(sthula)* or physical form, with hands and feet and the like, as celebrated in the *Devistotra* of the Puranas and Tantras. Devi, who as *Prakriti* is the source of Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshvara, has both male and female forms. But it is in Her female forms that she is chiefly contemplated."[15]

Apart from tracing the beauty of the Goddess limb by limb, the hymn makes a

passing reference to the love-play of the Divine Couple. Such frank descriptions of beauty of form or allusions to divine amorousness are a common feature of many a religious text of the Hindus. But there hardly is anything to compare with the lush delineation of divine love, and love-making, which Jaidev, the Sanskrit poet, has put in his great poem, the *Geet Govind* .

A friend describes to Radha the wanton flirting of Krishn with the Gopis :

*"Sandal and garment of yellow and lotus garlands upon his body of blue,*
*In his dance the jewels of his ears in movement dangling over his smiling cheeks,*
*Krishna here disports himself with charming women given to love.*
*He embraces one woman, he kisses another, and fondles another beautiful one,*
*He looks at another one lovely with smiles, and starts in pursuit of another woman.*
*Krishna here disports himself with charming women given to love."*

Radha, sick with longing, implores the friend :

*"O make him enjoy me, my friend, that Krishna so fickle, I who am shy like a girl on her way to the first of her trysts of love,*
*O make him enjoy me, my friend, that Krishna so fickle,*
*who sweated and moistened all over my body with love's exertion,*
*That Krishna whose cheeks were lovely with down all standing on end as he thrilled,*
*Whose half-closed eyes were languid, and restless with brimming desire.*
*O make him enjoy me, my friend, that Krishna so fickle,*
*Me whose masses of curls were like loose-slipping flowers, whose amorous words*
*Were vague as of doves, that Krishna whose bosom is marked*
*With scratches, surpassing all in his love that the science of love could teach."*

And here is the detailed portrayal of what one commentator calls "height upon height of sexual bliss" :

*"Their love play grown great was very delightful, the love play where thrills were a hindrance to firm embraces.*
*Where their helpless closing of eyes was a hindrance to longing looks at each other, and their secret talk to their drinking of each the other's nectar of lips, and where the skill of their love was hindered by boundless delight.*
*She loved as never before throughout the course of the conflict of love, to win, lying over his beautiful body, to triumph over her lover;*
*And so through taking the active part her thighs grew lifeless, and languid her vine-like arms, and her heart beat fast, and her eyes grew heavy and closed...*
*In the morning most wondrous, the heart of her lord was smitten with arrows of Love, arrows which went through his eyes,*

*Arrows which were her nail-scratched bosom, her reddened sleep-denied eyes, her crimson lips from a bath of kisses, her hair disarranged with the flowers awry, and her girdle all loose and slipping.*
*With hair knot loosened and stray locks waving, her cheeks perspiring, her glitter of lips impaired,*
*And the necklace of pearls not appearing fair because of her jar-shaped breast being denuded,*
*And her belt, her glittering girdle, dimmed in beauty,*
*The happy one drank of the face where the lips were washed with the juice of his mouth,*
*His mouth half open uttering amorous noises, vague and delirious, the rows of teeth in the breath of an indrawn sigh delightedly chattering.*
*Drank of the face of that deer-eyed woman whose body lay helpless, released of excessive delight, the thrilling delight of embraces*" (George Keyt's translation)

This is in the mediaeval period, when the reaction against the earlier philosophy of renunciation and denial of life and beauty and love and pleasure reached the farthest end of the pendulum. For the Buddh deliverance from desire was the supreme goal. The Ten Precepts of the Buddhist moral code were, like the Ten Commandments of the Christian, prohibitions : "Kill not; steal not ; commit not adultery ; lie not , drink not strong drink ; eat no food except at the stated times ; use no wreaths, ornaments or perfumes ; use no high mats or thrones (to sit or sleep upon) ; abstain from dancing, singing, music and worldly spectacles ; own no gold or silver and accept none." Likewise, women were to be shunned and their wicked wiles guarded against. Nuns or nymphs, all women were no better than courtesans, and they had but one aim to tempt man. "In forty ways", we are told in one Parable of the Buddhists, "does a woman accost a man...She yawns, she bows down, she makes amorous gestures, she pretends to be abashed, she rubs the nails of one hand or foot with the nails of the other hand or foot, she places one foot on another foot, she scratches on the ground with a stick. She causes her boy to leap up, she causes her boy to leap down, she dallies with her boy and makes him dally with her, she kisses him and makes him kiss her, she eats food and makes him eat food, she gives and begs for gifts, she imitates whatever he does. She talks in a loud tone, she talks in a low tone ; she talks as in public, she talks as in private. While dancing, singing, playing musical instruments, weeping, making amorous gestures, adorning herself, she laughs and looks. She sways her hips, she jiggles her waist-gear, uncovers her thigh, covers her thigh, displays her armpit, and displays her navel. She buries the pupils of her eyes, lifts her eye-brows, scratches her lips, and dangles her tongue. She takes off her loin-cloth, puts on her loin-cloth, takes off her turban, and puts on her turban." Thus doth a woman employ all the devices of a woman, all the graces of a woman.

The Master harped again and again on one theme—Renounce lust and free yourself from desire :

"*Whoever in this world renounces lusts, whoever abandons the house-life and*

*retires from the world,*
*Whoever has extinguished the essence of lust, such a man I call a Brahman"*

Thus to stay single was the ideal. At best, the attitude was that which St. Paul takes in the 'first epistle to the Corinthians, that of suffering sex as a necessary evil, of permitting indulgence, if one cannot do without it, lawfully and to the minimum :

"Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me : It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence : and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband : and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer : and come together again, that Satan tempt ye not for your incontinency. But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.

"For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry : for it is better to marry than to burn.

"And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband· But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband : and let not the husband put away his wife.

"Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned : and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh."

"Trouble in the flesh !" How much trouble this approach was to cause, and is still causing, is common knowledge. Prudery and hypocrisy have ruled the world ever since, so that the interval between then and now has been characterised by a constant conflict between the healthy and healthful fulfilment of desire and this pale and sickly, morbid and frustrating, attitude towards sex. Instead of freely accepting the joy that comes from mating, and experiencing the ecstasy of the love-act, without no and nay from within, it became necessary for those who would be respectable to adopt, at least outwardly, a pose of slighting the beauty of the body, of spiting the attractions of the flesh, and of scorning the delights of the embrace.

But we live in skeptical times ; and in the age of space-conquest and of weapons which could destroy both gods and goblins, little store can be set by the light the Buddh shed, or the pearls of wisdom which St. Paul cast. Scientists, thinkers, writers and social reformers have fought out a bitter battle and have all but demolished the high walls false religion and falser authority had built around the natural and the healthy and the joyous in man, his instincts, and his need and desire for sex. A Joad or an Huxley scoffed away the prejudices and prudery of the henchmen of Mrs. Grundy. Men like D.H. Lawrence staked their honour and

career for the righteous cause of re-establishing the truth and beauty and goodness of our sex instinct and their right to describe the joyous experience of healthy mating. And the literature of the modern age can now furnish hundreds of beautiful pages relating to the worship of the body and the great delight, not trouble, which flesh can confer upon flesh. The men and women of today, determined to believe in the facts of life and not in the fiction of faith, have often known the feelings of awe and ecstasy, akin to a religious experience, which the beautiful body of the beloved can cause. What the hero and heroine of Romains' exquisite novel, *The Body's Rapture*, found in each other is not an altogether uncommon experience, even though others who have known it cannot express it equally well. Anyway, modern secular literature links up across the centuries the divine love-play with the profane and emphasises that essentially the two are not different, that the religion of the flesh is no idle phrase, but a veritable religious experience.

Obviously, either the patrons of orthodox sex morality are unlucky and have never got anything but trouble from the flesh, have not experienced the joy and wonder and sense of worship which the naked and the beautiful inspire and bestow; or, there is a callous, studied and hypocritical attitude willed by vested interests and sustained at all costs. Joad's summing-up of the situation *vis-a-vis* this is an excellent piece of writing. In his *Guide to Modern Wickedness* he says, under "Prudery" :

"At the open-air swimming pool in which I bathe in London we are required to wear what is called 'regulation' costume. The need for regulation costume constitutes in itself a new regulation. A few years ago trunks were considered sufficient, and, earlier, still, slips. You might conclude that we are grown more prudish, in that we now take exception to the sight of the male thorax and stomach which we were formerly able to tolerate. You would be wrong. In one respect we are less prudish than we were. A year or so ago we had to wear slips under our constumes in order, presumably, to 'fig-leaf' certain salient portions of our persons. This is, however, no longer insisted upon. However, though we are strictly secluded from the unauthorized female eye, we are no longer permitted to lie about naked in the enclosure, and expose ourselves to the sun and air. Men, it seems, are supposed not to know, or, if they know, not to see, what other men look like. Finally, men and women are only permitted to bathe in one another's company on two days out of the seven, when they must pay six pence each for the privilege. On other days the open-air pool is free. I asked the attendant what was the reason for making a charge for mixed bathing, but not for unmixed, and he replied that it was in order 'to keep out the riff-raff'. Now the riff-raff consists, presumably, of the lower orders, from which I conclude that opportunities for the observation of the contours of one another's bodies, as outlined by a covering of cotton or wool, which are considered permissible in those whose incomes rise above a certain level, are regarded as prejudicial to the morality of those whose incomes fall below it. I am confirmed in this conclusion by the fact that, at the neighbouring Lido only a mile or so away, the regulations are different. The sexes bathe freely together, and the male

chest and thorax are shamelessly exposed. But then at the Lido one pays .."

And, again, "The whole question of decency and indecency is in the last degree puzzling. We look down on the Victorians because they swathed their women in layers of stuff, for all the world as if they were silkworms in cocoons, and did not permit them to avow the possession of legs. (My grandmother, by the way, always swathed the legs of her grand piano on the ground that, being legs, albeit only of wood, their starkness was somehow indecent. So enwrapped were the legs of women in my childhood that, until I was ten years old, I always thought that the other sex were solid and single down to a point just above the ankles. At the ankles women divided and branched out into two feet.) But the Victorians made a great display of breasts, and the triumphant busts of the eighteen-sixties, if exposed to-day, would bring a blush of embarrassment to many a contemporary emancipated flibbertigibbet.

"The attitude of religious persons in this matter I also find perplexing. A woman's hair, we are told, is her glory, but we do not permit her to display it in church, presumably because God, who gave it, is affronted by the sight of His gift. In Catholic countries stringent regulations are made against short-skirted and short-sleeved women entering churches, from which I also deduce that God is also affronted by the appearance of women's shins and elbows, the sight of which must be withheld from Him. Since He made them and is credibly reported to have been pleased with His work and to have found it good, this seems a little hard. And what of the young Catholic girls who take their ablutions under a rubber sheet, containing an aperture for the head, which is thrown over the top of the bath, so that they shall not be affronted by the sight of their own bodies? Or they wear goggles, or even blinkers . "

This pertains, of course, only to being and seeing 'nude'. Towards the sex act, too, the same senseless attitude of hypocrisy, of suppressing and repressing the healthy urge of love, is what authority, lay and spiritual, social and scriptural, chose to adopt. Speaking about his great book, *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, Lawrence wrote at length against the grey disease of hypocrisy :

"And this is the real point of this book. I want men and women to be able to think sex, fully, completely, honestly and cleanly.

"Even if we can't act sexually to our complete satisfaction, let us at least think sexually, complete and clear. All this talk of young girls and virginity, like a blank white sheet on which nothing is written, is pure nonsense. A young girl and a young boy is a tormented tangle, a seething confusion of sexual feelings and sexual thoughts which only the years will disentangle. Years of honest thoughts of sex, and years of struggling action in sex will bring us at last where we want to get, to our real and accomplished chastity, our completeness, when our sexual act and our sexual thought are in harmony, and the one does not interfere with the other.

"The mind has to catch up, in sex : indeed, in all the physical acts. Mentally, we lag behind in our sexual thought, in a dimness, a lurking, grovelling fear which belongs to our raw, somewhat bestial ancestors. In this one respect, sexual and physical, we have left the mind unevolved. Now we have to catch up, and make a

balance between the consciousness of the body's sensations and experiences, and these sensations and experiences themselves. Balance up the consciousness of the act, and the act itself. Get the two in harmony... It means having a proper reverence for sex, and a proper awe of the body's strange experience. It means being able to use the so-called obscene words, because these are a natural part of the mind's consciousness of the body. Obscenity only comes in when the mind despises and fears the body, and the body hates and resists the mind."[16] Substitute soul for the mind, and we are speaking, so to put it, in terms which equate modern thinking with the religious philosophy incarnate on Khajuraho's holy structures or propounded in the *Veds*, the *Purans*, the *Kamshastrs*, or Tantrik literature of ancient India. Sex is neither a puzzle nor a problem nor something about which we have to be apologetic. For, as Lawrence put it, "My sex is pure as my mind is to me, and no body will make me feel shame about it". It is a good, straight, clean and joyous gift of Nature which can make for great delight and even spiritual fulfilment of our being. In the words, once again, of Lawrence :

"Desire is a living stream. If we gave free rein or a free course to our living flow of desire, we shouldn't go far wrong. It's quite different from giving a free rein to an itching, prurient imagination. That is our vileness.

"The living stream of sexual desire itself does not often, in any man, find its object, its confluent, the stream of desire in a woman into which it can flow. The two streams flow together, spontaneously, not often, in the life of any man or woman. Mostly, men and women alike rush into a sort of prostitution. Because our idiotic civilisation has never learned to hold in reverence the true desire-stream. We force our desire from our ego ; and this is deadly.

"Desire itself is a pure thing, like sunshine, or fire, or rain. It is desire that makes the whole world living to me, keeps me in the flow connected. It is my flow of desire that makes me move as the birds and animals move through the sunshine and the night, in a kind of accomplished innocence, not shut outside of the natural paradise. For life is a kind of Paradise."[17]

Indeed, in times when a straight belief in God and religion is getting more and more out of vogue, sex is the one instinct of man which can still make us experience near-mystical ecstasy. On this theme of love and spirituality volumes have been and can be written, but there is little doubt that sex is more than just a biological necessity for the propagation of the species. In their book *Sex and Society*, Walker and Fletcher put the matter succinctly .

"Love at its best extends far beyond the narrow confines of the reproductive act and, as P.D. Ouspensky has pointed out, may provide for an ordinary man his nearest approach to a mystical experience.

"Of all ordinary human experience only sex sensations approach those which we may call mystical. Of all we know in life, only in love is there a taste of the mystical, a taste of ecstasy. Nothing else in our life brings us so near to the limit of human possibilities beyond which begin the unknown, and in this lies, without doubt, the chief cause of the terrible power of sex over human souls.

"That religion and sexual emotion at its highest have much in common is shown by the frequency with which erotic symbols are to be found in sacred literature. This is particularly true of Sufi literature, but examples of erotic symbolism are also to be found in the Bible, that charming love poem, 'The Song of Solomon', being one of them ; and in much Christian mystical literature.

"It would be as logical to regard reproduction as being subsidiary to love as to regard sexual love as being subsidiary to reproduction. Excellent arguments could indeed be marshalled to support the view that the highest function of sexuality is to assist the spiritual growth of the individual and that the perpetuation of the human race is only one of its secondary purposes. Berdyaev would appear to be of this opinion, that the real significance and function of love between the sexes is to assist spiritual development. In *The Destiny of Man* he wrote :

'The meaning and the purpose of the union between man and woman is to be found, not in the continuation of the species, or in its social import, but in personality, in its striving for the completeness and fullness of life and its longing for eternity.'"[18]

Sex is then no enigma, only anathema, created deliberately by the vested interests of the individual as well as the community. A bogey has been built out of it to confuse the innocent and terrorise the credulous. The Hindu of old, with many another healthy ancient race, saw clearly—what is now freely conceded by all sane men—that sexual desire was a normal and joy-giving instinct like other instincts of our being, and one which can be employed and enjoyed straight, or canalised to create a greater personality, to evolve something finer and fuller out of ourselves. One of our modern thinkers, Krishnamurti, has made some very pertinent remarks on this issue :

"Why is it that whatever we touch we turn into a problem ? We have made God a problem, we have made love a problem, we have made . living a problem, and we have made sex a problem. Why ? Why are we suffering ? Sex is certainly a relevant question, but there is the primary question, why do we make life into a problem ? Working, sex, earning money, thinking, feeling, experiencing—you know the whole business of living—why is it a problem? Is it not essentially because we always think from a particular point of view, from a fixed point of view ?... What do we mean by the problem of sex ? Is it the act, or is it a thought about the act ? Surely it is not the act. The sexual act is no problem to you, any more than eating, but if you think about eating or anything else all day long because you have nothing else to think about, it becomes a problem to you. Is the sexual act the problem or is it the thought about the act ? Why do you think about it, build it up, which you are obviously doing, with your cinemas, magazines, stories, the way women dress—everything ? Why does the mind build it up, why does the mind think about sex at all ? Why has it become a central issue in your life ? When there are so many things calling, you give complete attention to the thought of sex. And what happens when your minds are so occupied with it? Because that is a way of ultimate escape, is it not ? It is a way of complete self-

forgetfulness. For the time being, at least for that moment, you can forget yourself and there is no other way of forgetting yourself. Everything else you do in life gives emphasis to the 'me,' to the self. Your business, your religion, your gods, your leaders, your political and economic actions, your escapes, your social activities, your choice of a party—all that is emphasizing and giving strength to the 'me'. And as there is only one act in which there is no emphasis on the 'me', it becomes a problem, does it not? When there is only one thing in your life which is an avenue to ultimate escape, to complete self-forgetfulness, if only for a few seconds, you cling to it because that is the only moment in which you are happy. Every other issue you touch becomes a nightmare, a source of suffering and pain. So you cling to the one thing which gives complete self-forgetfulness, which you call happiness. But when you cling to it, it too becomes a nightmare, because then you want to be free from it, you do not want to be a slave to it. So you invent, again from the mind, the idea of chastity, of celibacy, and you try to be celibate, to be chaste, through suppression, all of which are operations of the mind to cut itself off from the fact. This again gives particular emphasis to the 'me' who is trying to become something, so again you are caught in travail, in trouble, in effort, in pain.

"Sex becomes an extraordinarily difficult and complex problem so long as you do not understand the mind which thinks about the problem. The act itself can never be a problem but the thought about the act creates the problem. The act you safeguard ; you live loosely, or indulge yourself in marriage, thereby making your wife into a prostitute which is all apparently very respectable, and you are satisfied to leave it at that. Surely the problem can be solved only when you understand the whole process and structure of the 'me' and 'mine' : my wife, my child, my property, my car, my achievement, my success ; until you understand and resolve all that, sex as a problem will remain."[19]

Thus it is all a matter of our ego, and, in a way, the same old thing : that nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so, that our hell and heaven are in our own mind. "To the puritan", unfortunately, as Huxley remarks, "all things are impure". For the enlightened intellect all, both good and evil, is illusion and all is even, samely, undifferentiated, of God and from God. That is why the Indian, whose religion was a way of living, took note of this great instinct of man, first fitted it rightly into a practical pattern of existence and then wove a whole philosophy, which, fully understood and properly practised, lifts one at one end on to dizzy heights, and pushes one, on the other, to what seem to be the lowest depths of degradation. With this philosophy brought as with all other explanations and justifications offered regarding the intriguing phenomenon of erotic sculpture on temple walls, we shall deal in the next chapter.

# 10

# Sermons in Stone

*Not my way of salvation, to surrender the world!*
*Rather for me the taste of Infinite Freedom*
*While yet I am bound by a thousand bonds to the wheel .*
*In each glory of sound and sight and scent*
*I shall find Thy infinite joy abiding :*
*My passion shall burn as the flame of salvation,*
*The flower of my love shall become the ripe fruit of devotion.*

—RABINDRANATH TAGORE

IN the last chapter we were chiefly concerned with the first of the three sub-divisions we made of the issue of erotic sculpture. We examined the fundamental question of sex and flesh as a problem for poor man, as sin, as something wrong, or at least not wholly right, as a domain of the devil in contradistinction to the realm of the spiritual, our better nature, our soul. We saw how the gods themselves find joy in this most delicious and fruitful of all sports, so that men and women need not feel wretched on this score. We saw also how ancient religion and modern science adopt the same sane approach to the subject. Today, no healthy or intelligent person takes the much publicised dichotomy of the flesh and the spirit, of sex and soul seriously. And those who still do that are either looked down upon as vicious and hypocritical, or are pitied, and sympathised with, as pyschic cases of retarded mental growth. It is now freely recognised that as prime need of our nature, sex is not just a "hunger," but a source of delight and development and is a means of the fulfilment of the individual and the immortality of the species.

The second point, relating to the matter of obscenity, was discussed, in passing, in the preceding chapters. It is not necessary to dwell upon this aspect of the total issue at length, for two reasons. First, because the shade of carnality, the degree of the sexual, in the sculptural representation is of less importance, if important at

all, compared to the fundamental query regarding the intrusion of the sexual into the sphere of the spiritual. If this encroachment of the body upon the territory of the soul is basically in order, then a little less or more, and finer or coarser, hardly matters. Secondly, and as we pointed out in an earlier chapter, namely, "Things Humanity Hides Away," the so-called loose and vulgar and perverse are not so easily regarded nor straightway accepted as such by authorities on sex, whether these authorities be masters of old or scientists of today

We shall briefly restate the position *vis-a-vis* this here, and then pass on to the last and the most important part of the puzzle, to what, in fact, constitutes the real problem : Why all these carvings on *temple walls* ?

Regarding the "obscene" in sex, what is indecent and abnormal for one individual or society may be quite right and regular for another individual or social set-up. As with our habits of food or modes of clothing, so it is with regard to the patterns of sexual behaviour. Even today, and in spite of all the modern facilities for the rapid intercommunication of thought and exchange of culture, great divergencies obtain in practically every sector of human life. Upon the same planet, nay within the same square mile, women will walk in *burqa*, full veil of the orthodox Muslim female, while some other female specimen of the species will ride a scooter, and be wearing hardly anything more than a pair of sun-glasses and a pair of panties, with a scarf thrown between the two to cover still necessary minimum of her breasts. Kissing in public is right for the Western civilization, wrong for Indians; so that the same film censor-board of the Indian Government is obliged to disallow one scene in an indigenous picture, and pass an identical shot for screening in the same hall, and, possibly for the same audience, in an imported reel. There are societies where polygamy is the right way, others where polyandry is the command divine. In several countries the word "illegitimate" finds no place in their dictionaries ; in others to touch anyone but one's rightful wife or husband is regarded as an unwashable sin, and people have, and suffer from, the kind of complexes which orthodoxy has created through declaring that he who has lusted after another's wife, even in the mind, has committed adultery. There are grandmothers who still insist upon explaining to young girls the phenomenon of the birth of a baby in terms of the stork's gift—and the girls continue to spare the grandma and to indulge her in her ignorance. On the other hand, in regions like, say, Tahiti the performance of the sexual act between parents does not have to be an awesome secret, nor is any attempt made to conceal things of this sort from the young. In this connection, here is some interesting comment by one writer who made a study of the life of the Tahitians :

"The whole Western vocabulary of shame is unknown to them. They have no word for licentious, lascivious, incestuous, impure, indecent, obscene, libidinous, salacious. These words themselves, when explained, seem to them to be indecent since they cast a shadow of disgrace upon a phase of existence as normal as any other.

"They see no reason to be furtive about the facts of life. Except where influenced

by *popaa* conventions, they will discuss sex as candidly as food or drink.

"But you don't talk of such matters before children,' I said to old Taka chief in a north shore district.

"'Why not? is it a thing the children should not know?'

"I explained how Western parents wait until the child has reached an age of understanding, then lead into the subject delicately with stories of the birds and bees.

"Taka wrinkled his forehead. 'Why birds and bees?'

"Just to show that it is natural.'

"Our children know it is natural. As soon as they know anything at all they know about this. Come, I will show you.'

"He led the way inside his thatch and bamboo house. The interior was one great room. There was not a sign of a partition, nor even a curtain. Here and there on the mat floor lay pillows and covers, not yet taken up after the night's sleep.

"Twelve persons sleep in this room,' the chief said, 'My wife and I there, my older son and his wife there, ..six boys and girls wherever they can be fitted in.' He looked at me. 'Now you understand why we can have no secrets from our children.'

"But don't the children try to imitate their elders?'

"Certainly, but they accomplish nothing, so they soon turn to some game they can play with more success.'

"For Tahitian children there is no glamour of mystery over this department of life. It means nothing to them until puberty. In this tropical climate, puberty comes at about twelve years. From that time on, sex means a great deal.

"The girl's grandmother—it is usually the grandmother who undertakes the sex education of the young—gives her final instructions and may provide her with a phial of perfumed coconut oil to make the first experience more tolerable. Then the girl is on her own. If she does not soon have something to report her family begins to worry that men find her undesirable.

"If she becomes pregnant everyone looks forward happily to the birth of the child. During the pre-natal period the girl may not be able to name the father. After the baby is born she decides, with the help of the whole village, what young man the child most resembles."[1]

One could go on pointing out disparities between the ways and views of person and person, and peoples and peoples. They exist all around us, and in every field of activity, so that the sociologist, or even the man with common sense, will not jump to hasty conclusions. He knows that seeing is believing, and that our view of the whole thing depends, as D.H. Lawrence puts it, "as usual, on the individual. What is pornography to one man is the laughter of genius to another." Discussing pornography and obscenity, he says:

"The same with the word *obscene*: nobody knows what it means. Suppose it were derived from *obscena*: that which might not be represented on the stage; how much further are you? None! What is obscene to Tom is not obscene to Lucy or Joe,

and really, the meaning of a word has to wait for majorities to decide it. If a play shocks ten people in an audience, and doesn't shock the remaining five hundred,... the play is not obscene, by majority. But *Hamlet* shocked all the Cromwellian Puritans, and shocks nobody today, and some of Aristophanes shocks everybody today, and didn't galvanise the later Greeks at all, apparently. Man is a changeable beast, and words change their meanings with him, and things are not what they seemed, and what's what becomes what isn't, and if we think we know where we are it's only because we are so rapidly being translated to somewhere else. We have to leave everything to the majority, everything to the majority, everything to the mob, the mob, the mob. They know what is obscene and what isn't, they do. If the lower ten million doesn't know better than the upper ten men, then there's something wrong with mathematics. Take a vote on it ! Show hands, and prove it by count ! Vox Populi, Vox Dei. Odi profanum vulgus ! Profanum vulgus."

Indeed he is clear that what makes things go wrong is the official and popular attitude of turning sex into a "dirty little secret". Pornography is the attempt to insult sex, to do dirt on it. This is unpardonable. Take the very lowest instance, the picture post-card sold underhand by the underworld, in most cities. What I have seen of them have been of an ugliness to make you cry. The insult to the human body, the insult to a vital human relationship ! Ugly and cheap they make the human nudity, ugly and degraded they make the sexual act, trivial and cheap and nasty. It is the same with the books they sell...the same with dirty limericks that people tell after dinner, or the dirty stories one hears commercial travellers telling each other in a smoke-room ..usually they are just ugly and repellent, and the so-called 'humour' is just a trick of doing dirt on sex."

And, "How to get out of it ? There is only one way : Away with the secret ! No more secrecy ! The only way to stop the terrible mental itch about sex is to come out quite simply and naturally into the open with it. It is terribly difficult, for the secret is cunning as a crab. Yet the thing to do is to make a beginning. The man who said to his exasperating daughter : 'My child, the only pleasure I ever had out of you was the pleasure I had in begetting you'—has already done a great deal to release both himself and her from the dirty little secret."[2]

And so, recognising the existence and validity of the great and "mysterious flow of desire, from us and towards us", which sustains not only men and women but even the worlds, the stars and the suns, "we shall have to say to every man : '*Be Thyself ! Be Desirous !*' and to every woman : '*Be Thyself ! Be Desirable !*' "

Part of the message which the erotic sculptures of Hindu temples convey is what Lawrence proclaims. Only we do not have to make a beginning. We have just to restart being sane, clean and honest in respect of everything about ourselves, including about the most important element of human nature, sex. For, "it may be said of humanity", as Dr. Malchow puts it in his book, *The Sexual Life*, "that if it lives for any one purpose more than another, that purpose is sexual."

For a scientific view of the issue of the vulgar and the abnormal and the indecent in sexual behaviour, let us quote, once again, the opinion of Havelock Ellis:

"In all animals, even those most nearly allied to Man, coitus is effected by the male approaching the female posteriorly. In men, the normal method of male approach is anteriorly—face to face—the position of so-called *Venus Obversa*. While, however, the *Venus Obversa* may be regarded as the specifically human method of coitus, there are modifications of it, and other more animal-like methods which have been adopted by various peoples as national customs, and which, therefore, come within the normal range of variation. It is a mistake to regard them as vicious perversions."

Or, "It is not understood that here, amid the most intimate mysteries of love, we are in a region where the cold and abstract viewpoints either of science or of aesthetics are out of place unless qualified by more specially human emotions. To the rigid formalist in these matters, well intentioned but ignorant, we may gently recall the endlessly wise words of Shakespeare, 'Love talks with better knowledge and knowledge with dearer love.'

"It may be added that of the 100 married women investigated by Hamilton—presumably normal and healthy women and of good social position--he-found that thirteen had had experience of *fellatio, cunnilinctus*, or both, but in no case could any ill effect be discovered. 'No sex play is psychologically taboo,' Hamilton reasonably concludes, while making certain reservations, of which the most important are that no injury to physical structure is involved and that there are no serious guilt reactions. That is important. Hamilton states that he has elsewhere met with a series of cases of naive persons who had innocently practised some such 'perversion,' without knowing how formidable and objectionable it appeared to many whereupon 'the shock of suddenly acquiring a belief that they had been engaged in a loathsome and perverted practice appeared to precipitate serious paranoid symptoms'. Nothing could better show how urgent it is to spread abroad more sensible notions on these matters. A woman should be 'assured', as Dickinson, a wise and experienced gynaecologist, declares, 'that there is nothing in the fullest sweep of passion that is not compatible with her highest ideals of spiritual love, and that all mutual intimacy of behaviour is right between husband and wife.' " [8]

In our own ancient texts on the science of erotics, we have chapter upon chapter enumerating and describing an amazingly large variety of poses. A knowledge of these was regarded as an essential part of a cultured man's education so that the lover or husband could give the fullest satisfaction to his mate and derive the maximum pleasure for himself through adopting the pose most suited for union with a particular person. Considering that there is such dissimilarity between the natures and bodies of different men and different women, and considering further that men and women of various regions vary in their build and blood and tastes and temperaments, our investigators recognised the need for, and freely allowed recourse to, what are commonly regarded as uncommon postures. We could give innumerable examples in support of this from the inexhaustible wealth of material on the subject in the erotic literature of olden India. Here is one significant passage emphasising the desirability of excercising great care in this matter and exhorting the male to choose

the right form of sexual conduct and congress with reference to the woman who is his partner on the occasion.

"Besides the universal application of the rules mentioned above, let us describe the variations in love-life, prevailing in different regions of India.

"The women of Madhya-Desa are fond of diverse kinds of embraces—but they avoid love-bites and nail scratchings.

"The women of Avanti are very much akin to their sisters of Madhya-Desa in taste. They are particularly attached to the lover who has the ingenuity of pleasing them by indulging in varying postures.

"The women of Malava and of Abhira are deeply fond of daily embraces. Though averse to love-bite and scratching they appreciate very much *Tadana* (blows of lovers) and *Auparistaka* (i.e. excitement of the yoni by tongue caress).

"The women of the valleys of the Indus, Ravi, Chenab (in the Punjab) and of Jumuna yield immediately to the caress of their yoni by lover's tongue.

"The women of Lata and Kalinga enjoy the amorous strokes, bites and nail-scratchings. The women of Karnataka and Trilinga are extremely greedy for continuous congress, day and night, without food or rest. They passionately prefer the coital posture, *Vadavakam*, wherein the lingam lingers for a longer period inside the yoni without emission.

"The women of Kosala suffer from a chronic irritation of yoni ; so nothing but repeated strokes and prolonged embraces with a vigorous lingam can assuage their passions.

"The women of Maharastra are well-trained amorists. They are keenly excited by an experienced lover, but loathe the ignorant and artless amateurs.

"The women of Kerala do not like love-bites and nail-imprints, but they positively enjoy cunnilingus and *Purushayita* (Playing the reverse role over the lover).

"The women of Chola are coquettish and would yield after a prolonged courtship and external caresses.

"The women of Pandya are exceedingly passionate. They intensely desire their lovers to hug and squeeze their nipples and breasts, to bite their lips, strike their chests with nails and to excite the yoni both by manipulation and cunnilingus.

"The women of Oddra, Yavana-Desa, Vanga (Orissa, Persia, Arabia, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Bengal, Assam) are avid for a vigorous embrace, intensified by manual and lingual excitation of the yoni. The women of Lanka yearn for eight kinds of external caresses, accompanied by a stimulating congress.

"It is really an impossible task to fathom the inscrutable nature of women of all lands. A lover should therefore concentrate his attention and thought on studying the sexual nature of the particular woman and the essential characteristics of her race. He should then attempt enjoying her in that special fashion that would excite her sex-urge most effectively."[4]

And as if this knowledge of the physiology of love were not enough, the author then passes on to the expounding of the romantic preliminaries essential for a happy and successful "consummation...in a crystal palace bathed by moonlight .."

Let us now move on to the crux of the whole matter. In relation to our study of the temples of Khajuraho, the main question is as to why we find this seemingly sinister element of sexual scenes sprinkled here and splashed there as sculpture on sacred surfaces. There are a dozen and more explanations and interpretations. Some of these are trivial and superficial. Others are so intricate and elaborate that separate volumes can be, and have been, written to sound their depth, state their significance, and to unravel the mysterious and the esoteric which they claim to be based upon or leading up to. We shall examine the more important of these in detail, for, according to some of these theories, the love-sculptures are veritable sermons. Interpreted that way, the erotic carvings and sculpted couplings at Khajuraho and elsewhere are not indecent stone, but coded scriptures and symbols of high import. They have a meaning and philosophy about them which it is difficult to grasp, and which, in no case, should be lightly dismissed nor darkly frowned upon and indignantly condemned. Whether the various theses, of which such sexual practices or erotic symbols as we see among temple carvings formed but a part, were an elaborate hoax or a really laudable and lofty achievement in the realms of intellectual thought and spiritual realisation, they deserve serious consideration . As it is, the Western mind concedes that on matters of sex, "East has specialised for centuries.. and has collected a vast store of knowledge. And indeed as Jung and other psychologists have outspokenly stated, 'we are but babies to them in deep things.'" But more than that, a correct appreciation of the process of development of these theories and theses might help the modern man to rectify much error in his own judgments and patterns of conduct. The human mind and nature, they say, have not altered much in the last 500,000 years, and therefore, surface differences apart, the brave new world which we inhabit is not very much different from the good old one, of hardly a thousand or two thousand years ago, which produced these philosophies. In fact, the beliefs and ideas which find expression on these temple walls were themselves a correction of, if not a corrective to, the erroneous thinking and preaching of men, including the Buddh himself, who chose to forget that the world of nature and man had not changed in any appreciable manner, nor was likely to change easily or quickly, and that therefore there was no warranty whatsoever to ignore the fundamental ingredients of our being. Buddh would banish woman and love and sex and beauty, nay life itself. This he called wisdom. As a result, at the end of a thousand years, the pendulum swings to the other extreme—of apparent folly which we find to be freely accepted as part of several creeds, Buddhist and Hindu, prevalent at the time when the temples of Khajuraho were constructed. And not in India only, but in Nepal and Tibet and far-off China and in several other lands, centuries of cunning thought brought about the same culmination.

It has been observed several times in preceding chapters that in respect of the art traditions, whether of architecture or sculpture, of themes or execution, the craftsmen of the Chandels had little to worry over. By the time the temples of Khajuraho came to be built, the process of experimentation had been completed, and elaborate and exhaustive theories had been developed and techniques and skills more

or less perfected. In a way this can prove to be a good thing, because the artist sets to working to a certain pattern and to achieving excellence in that rather than frittering away his energy in opposing earlier cults and creeds or trying out new idioms and styles. Thus, for the craftsmen of Khajuraho, as for the priests of those days, their work lay in selecting from existing modes and materials and attempting a reconstruction or, shall we say, a judicious synthesis, of the excellences which were already to hand. Of course, it is a matter of great credit that the Chandel artists were able to create out of all that such exquisite specimens of temple art. Yet so thorough was the mastery which the *shilpin* of those days had to acquire before he was put to work, and so accurate and unerring was his aesthetic instinct, that his achievement need not surprise us very much.

We repeat all this because if this basic point is understood well, then it would be seen that almost every feature of the art of Khajuraho's temples can be easily explained, and if necessary explained away, with reference to the injunctions and traditions travelling down to the craftsmen of this mediaeval kingdom. This is true not only of the architectural characteristics but also of the cult-images, and the general scheme as well as every detail of the sculptural decoration. Thus it is laid down that the artist "should ever conceive the beauty (*vapu*) of the images (of the angels) as youthful (*taruna*), rarely as childlike (*bala-sadrsa*), never as aged (*vrddha-sadrsa*)". That, for instance, will clarify why on the walls of the Khajuraho temples, both within and without, we find a galaxy of youthful images. Again, we observed earlier that the sculpting of beautiful females, *apsaras* and *nayikas*, was also enjoined upon the sculptor ; and so, there they are, the females of the species, adorning, in the full bloom of their beauty and the fragrance and freshness of their youth, the exterior and interior, facades and niches, of these fanes. Likewise, the canons required that the *prasads* should carry *mithuns*, erotic sculpture, because these figures are propitious, ward off evil and render the building immune to destruction. And just as the artist carried out other injunctions and instructions, so in this case also, he followed the rules and fulfilled the requirements. He had not stopped to reason why about the other things and, surely, it was none of his business to start questioning the propriety or inappropriateness of this item. Whether the people belonging to the generations that followed would or would not approve of all that, was of as little importance as it was to consider whether we who are today discussing their work, would like the style of their architecture, the form of their gods, the mode of their worship, their costume or jewellery or the way they wore their hair.

This is one explanation of the phenomenon of erotic sculpture on the walls of Khajuraho's temples. If it is accepted that the sculpting of obscenity will keep the structure from coming to harm, whether from lightning, earthquakes and other natural disasters or from wilful and wanton razing by a non-believer, it is but logical to assume that a profusion of these, or a marked grossness, should help still more. The larger the number, the looser the carving, the more effective the spell, obviously. If the rulers of Khajuraho could afford that their temples should be more lavishly carved than many a temple elsewhere ; that, as compared to, say, the

temples of Orissa which are so poorly and plain within, the Khajuraho temples should possess beautified and ornamented interiors, they would naturally wish that the charm for protecting the buildings should be as potent as it was possible to make it. If it was good to put some erotic symbolism, it was better to put more of it. If it was right and useful, in the first instance, to make the *mithun* a motif, it was more so to have a full range and riot of sex-play.

But this is just one explanation. Actually, there are nearly a score of them. If we refer to the myth regarding the origin of the Chandels, we find that after her son had come of age and become a ruler, Hemvati, ancestress of the dynasty, had a *yagya* performed, and got eighty-five temples built at Khajuraho, and she had obscene sculpture carved upon the temple walls as an act of expiation for her sinful liaison with *Chandr*, the Moon-god. This mode of *praishchit*, atonement for one's sins, forms a part of the ceremony known as the *Bandhya Yagya*. Such an action, such publishing of one's errors, should be regarded in the spirit in which the gesture is made. Even in modern times, a Gandhi would, in writing of his *Experiments with Truth*, like to own upto some of the things which, in his own opinion and estimate, were despicable and shameful. *Sadhus* and mendicants still go about putting dust and ashes on their bodies, or cover themselves in rags and foul clothing, in order to revile the flesh. There is such a small distance between the ridiculous and the sublime, so little to separate the acts of saints from those of mad men, that at times all that differentiates the two is the end from which the same phenomenon is viewed.

Another explanation often put forward is that the *mithun* carvings were a means of attracting the people to the temples, just as the fact that a certain number of *devdasis* were attached to the temples is regarded by many as an inducement to visitors. This justification has two aspects. In the first place, and at a more trivial even if more practical level, a larger number of pilgrims helped to enrich the coffers of the state as well as those of the temples. Like the tourists of today, the pilgrims meant money and foreign exchange. With religious structures spread all over the soil of India, the king and priest would desire, quite understandably, that their particular temples should prove to be better and greater attractions than those elsewhere. And if such carvings added to the attraction, why not have these and have them in plenty ? Secondly, and this time on a more serious plane, the idea might have been to lure the men howsoever one could. Let people come to the temple, whatever their motive or whatever the pulls which bring them to it, then like those who came to scoff but remained to pray, the visitors might be induced to go in and become worshippers. Human nature is like that—perverse and truant, refractory and recalcitrant. Child, adult or the aging person, all have to be induced with this toy or that temptation, lured in one way or another, that they may work or worship, go to school, factory or the fane. Such ruses and stratagem are necessary even normally. At that time, there was still some competition between not only the Shaivite and the Vaishnavite, but also between rival creeds like Hinduism and Jainism. In such warfare all was fair, and fair faces and pornographic postures on the walls of temples were but one weapon of the total armoury. As we shall

see later, a whole philosophy was evolved to offer to the devotee salvation through pleasures as against the pain and penance which were the means thereof in the older scheme of things spiritual. Not without point and reason did the *bhikshu* in Krishn Mishr's *Prabodh-Chandrodya* cry out . "How excellent is the religion which grants both sensual enjoyments and eternal felicity; it permits us to inhabit elegant houses and to possess women obedient to our wills; it removes the restrictions as to the time of eating; it allows us to recline on soft beds and to pass the shining moon-light night in amours with young damsels." Buddhism and Jainism, and for that matter all the earlier systems based on an ascetic way of seeking out the Supreme, had banished three things . woman, love and pleasure. All the three were back now, brought in by religion itself. Why not proclaim the return of all these to the fold by depicting them on the walls of temples? And so, the women are there, and the cups of wine and the delights of love-making, for all to see and thus to understand that the sun of joy had once again started shining on human existence. After all, as the Lotos-eaters of Tennyson sang, "Why should life all labour be?" or suffering and self-denial, and never repose or happiness.

Some authorities point out that these erotic sculptures occupy a certain significant location in the total scheme of the surface decoration. They explain that the sculptures portray the process of evolution. From vegetation to animals and then to the higher animals and the lower humans indulging in low activity; then we rise on to more elegant *mithun* scenes of cultured men and women, and then the semi-divine and divine beings and lovers adorn the temple, until we reach the super-God, *Parbrahm*, represented in the form of the *shikhar*, and the finial, or if we should conceive of Him that way, as pure abstraction. A variation of the same point from another angle is that by being placed on the exterior walls, and even there up to a certain height and not above that, they indicate that *kam*, sexual desire, belongs to and fits into the scheme of life in its own right, but it has to be kept to its proper place. The lower panels carry patterns of vegetation and animal life signifying the basis of existence, and scenes which portray the common round of activities, feasting, and hunting, dance and music. After the day's work and strife, do not men retire to the joys of love-making? The *shastric* injunction is that like *dharm* and *arth*, righteousness and pursuit of wealth, *kam* constitutes one of the chief aims of human existence, and is one of the right activities. And so for men and women in their youth and prime when the blood is hot and heady, while desire is aflame, and lust a living torrent, let their be free play of the passions, let the soul embrace the body and be mirrored in terms of sex. Yet, these men and women should not forget that always there are the gods above, that beyond the aim of *kam*, even as beyond the other aims of *arth* and *dharm*—nay, beyond life itself, there is our aim of aims, man's supreme goal, *moksh*, salvation of the soul. And so, as we look above, there are the gods, and beyond the gods themselves who might be portrayed in more refined and chaster *mithun* sculpture, there is the soaring *shikhar*, embodying the desire of the moth for the star, symbolising man's longing for the divine.

Continuing with the above, another way of interpreting the placing of the

erotic sculpture only on the outside is that the devotee who has come to the temple is being tested. He is being reminded, so to say, of the seemingly delight-bestowing temptations which the outside world holds for us. That eternal conflict between the pleasant and the good, of which every religion speaks so eloquently, is being posed all over again for the human soul. Let him who would enter the interior leading to the holy of holies, let him reflect well, and leave all thought of the carnal behind him. Even as we leave behind our shoes to which the dust of the road and the mire of the path stick, so let us not carry into the sanctum anything which is low and unworthy. Or, else, let us turn back and retrace our steps to the world of present kisses which spell future damnation.

Another school of thought is of the view that the obscenities carved on the temple walls are, in fact, an attempt to provide what would today amount to education in sex hygiene. The joy of clean and healthy copulation, akin almost to serenity born of spiritual excellence and *yogic* attainments, stands at one end of the gamut. At the other end of the range, there is vulgar desire indulged in a vulgar way befitting beasts and not civilized men and women. What the written texts of those days, works of writers like Vatsyayan, attempted in words, these sculptures presented in plastic forms. The world has come full circle, and today, after a long spell of misguided prudery or hypocritical love-making by night and body-decrying by day, there is, in all advanced countries, fair recognition of the need for a frank approach to this vital matter. Inhibitions of old are being cast away and educationists, medical advisers, psychiatrists and sociologists, parents, and men and women generally, are realising the long overdue necessity of educating people into clearer understanding of the so-called mysteries of sex. Merely because a thousand years earlier there were people who were enlightened enough to understand and appreciate all this, must we look askance at what they did, condemn what they realised and taught? Possibly we do this because the fact of their having grasped the significance and importance of imparting this training in sex makes us feel inferior to them, and so, out of mean-minded pique, we cannot but cast stones at them. Even if there are many vulgar and really obscene poses and variations of the sexual act portrayed on these walls, why should we not accept in this case also the explanation which we accepted in the case of the *asans*, postures, described by Vatsyayan. In a manual one puts all the information, and in a dictionary of the Queen's English all the words, and not only those which are fit for the Queen's use. Similarly, out of the 729 modes which Vatsyayan gives, not all are declared healthy or worthy of our pursuit. As to why these lessons in sex are engraved on temple walls one may point out that in olden times all education was imparted by the Brahmins, the priests. In any case, the temple constituted the most popular place of assembly, and placing these sculptures on those walls would benefit the largest number. Indeed, one might ask a counter-question : where else, if not on temple walls?

There are others who accept this sex education theory but in a different way. They think that these sculptures portray sexo-*yogic* exercises. There is no denying the immense all-round gain which right *yogic* practice can result in for those who

take to it. And anyone who knows anything of *yog* knows that the *yogis* of yore fully understood the place and importance of the sex instinct in the human system and perfected techniques for its subjugation and sublimation. That which causes destruction at the hands of the fool can be made into an instrument of the highest good by the wise. So with the fire of lust, and the torrent of man's passions. These the *yogi* converts into light and energy of amazing power and degree. But to be wise, especially in the matter of sex, is not easy. In spite of all the knowledge descending from the past and all the research and investigations which have been and are being so painstakingly carried out in this field, there is still a vast area of the unknown and the uncertain. As C. G. Hartley puts it,..."in sex we have as yet learnt very little, and I doubt sometimes if we can ever learn very much, except each one of us for ourselves out of our own experience. The sex emotions are among the deepest, if not the deepest of our nature ; they exercise an influence on every phase of development, and in one form or another, direct the entire being of the individual."[5] Thus, the physical, the mental or the moral, each, nay, the whole being of man, is intimately involved in the sex instinct. *Yog*, which at its highest is both knowledge and action, took serious notice of the issue and devised an elaborate system relating to its canalisation. The psychophysical exercises and controls are divided into what are called *bandhs* and *mudras*, and there are many postures recommended, all of which help to maintain a high virility and a perfectly regulated sexual life. We cannot go into all these details here, but one point must be mentioned since it has very important bearing on the carvings we are here discussing. It has been pointed out by many that, by and large, if not in all cases, the *mithun* sculpture depicts only the stage known as tumescence, but detumescence is not portrayed. That is to say, ejaculation of the semen, the orgasm, does not, or as some will say, should not, occur. The question of "should not", as a desirable, nay, necessary condition of the union will come up later in connection with the association of *mithun* as an essential element of the ritual of some of the sects. Yet that apart, the withholding of the ejaculation is a very well known practice of *yog*, in particular of *hathyog*, and is regarded as conducive to great good. The exercise forms a part of the technique known as *vajroli*, and we quote a simple exposition of this : "The highest technique of vajroli in its final stage, however, consists in successfully withholding the ejaculations of sex secretions prior to or during the period of an orgasm under sexual excitement, namely, coitus, and thus cause their resorption through the lymphatics ....What characterizes this aspect of vajroli is the special training for retention or resorption to which the sexual organs and the nervous system have been so harmonized to precise and favourable reactions and reflexes as conduce to wholesome sex life of both the partners."[6] Anyway, whether connected with the sexo-*yogic* exercises or not, this whole question of retention of the vital fluid and its resorption is of much significance, and we will revert to it when we take up the great philosophical theses which cover our theme. In fact, it is quite possible that this particular *yogic* exercise itself can be related to one of the philosophies, namely *Vajryan*, since the

word *vajroli* is derived, obviously, from *vajr*.

There are others who suggest that these sculptures are illustrations of the rites and practices—whether these be justifiable or not being another matter—of some of the comparitively obscure cults and esoteric sects, of people like the Tantriks, and the Shakts, Kauls and Kapaliks. It is well known that along with four other *makars*, items beginning with the letter M, namely, *madya* (wine), *mans* (meat), *matsya* (fish), and *mudra* (grain, woman or gesture), *maithun* (sexual union) constituted for them one of the essentials of the ritual and ceremony of worship. Backed by a high and profound philosophy which links Hinduism with Buddhism, these practices have had a mixed reception. Since these sects and cults are still not altogether extinct, strange stories of sexual orgies and abandon—the same kind which are now often heard of as a growing rage and fashion in Europe and America—are associated with them. Some of the more far gone sections of what are known as the *vammargi* (left-handed) Tantriks are, in particular, notorious for group-promiscuity in the name of religion. For instance, it is said that in some cases the ritual consists of all the women leaving their *cholis* (bodices) outside the room or place where the rite was being held, and the men would cast their lot, each picking up one piece. Irrespective of who the person was, the possession of her *choli* would entitle the man who picked it up to join with her in the ceremonial sexual intercourse. This licentious cohabitation can mean what it does mean for all those pleasure-loving, lust-stricken, cynical or rebellious men and women of today who would fling all values to the gods who claim to have fixed and proclaimed these for us. Yet, for the men and women who subscribed to those beliefs which enjoined such rites and ceremonies, this was not a low and vulgar matter of carnal pleasure and prurience. There was high sanction for such action. For the duration, each man was a god and each woman a goddess, personifications of Shiv and Parvati, or, for the corresponding Vaishnav sect, Krishn and Radha ; and no sin whatsoever attaches to what the gods choose to do. The ritual over, man became man and woman, woman; and that which had happened had not happened to them at all, so that, clean and whole, back went the women to their homes, pure as the *gopis* who had come out of their houses at dead of night in answer to the call of the flute. It appears that these sects were in existence in the period to which the temples of Khajuraho belong, and the region where the Chandel kingdom lay was surrounded by the more marked centres of such influence. As we know, the high philosophy of all such belief soon degenerated into low practice so that, a few centuries later, there was a sharp reaction which led to that beautiful concept of *prem*, love without passion, which chalked out for humanity yet another road to release, the way which a Meera took. But the experience of mankind is that though passion without love is not only conceivable but is often the rule in relations between the two sexes, love without passion is a rare thing and not easy of attainment. Nature will not be baulked and denied so that, yet once again, the subtle mind of man developed a new theory which could meet both ends. The Sahajiya cult, though it talks in terms of love, does not preclude love-making.

It is legitimate to ask whether the figment of religion, that while the ceremonial copulation was on the men and women were but deities, obviated the fact of their physicality so that no illegitimate progeny resulted. There are two explanations. One, that there are countless females and a fever and frenzy of sexual activity on the walls of these temples, but hardly any children, because it was a condition of the ritual that orgasm should not take place. Reference to this has been made above while discussing sexo-yogic exercices as the basis of the obscene illustrations. This is a precaution men and women had to take yesterday, do take today, and will have to take tomorrow, wherever dangerous relations are involved, wherever, that is, the legal rights of some one else are being encroached upon, whether such "usufruction" be indulged in in the name of religion, or emancipation or, again, because of that plain and simple but more honest thing called passion which, the lovers, blind to aught else from the burning fever of desire, cannot control. There is, however, another argument proffered in this connection the children were wanted, however they came, even as a Hitler would want them in later times to augment his military forces, to replace the war-decimated, to increase the population anyway, for larger numbers mean greater labour. The area which the Chandels ruled over and the contiguous region to the south-east, where also we find such carvings, were both sparsely populated This interpretation can be interlinked with the ancient fecundity and fertility cults which ordained the worship of the genital organs and the enacting of the sexual act as aids to better crops, both from the fields outside the home and the beds within. To these blighted pieces of land, in particular, such results would be welcome · rains and crops and more and more children; why, this was what the people wanted and what the gods could bestow if they were pleased. And so if this act or that ceremony propitiated the deity, who would dare to even insinuate that it was sinful? As to the age-old practices connected with fertility and fecundity, it may be stated that perhaps the true source of all these later developments lies in them. We shall consider this point and examine the ancient beliefs relating to it at some length after we have run through the list of all the explanations and interpretations of the *mithun* motif

Yet another set of critics would have it that the sculpture of mating is a secret language, a kind of code in which messages of great worth and moment have been recorded, and to those who understand this secret language, *guhiy-bhasha,* or *sandhya-bhasha* (twilight-language) as some others like to label it, much is revealed. What to us are merely love-poses and vulgar representations, were, for the adept and the initiated, sacred lore, whole chapters from some holy book. In the various *shastrs* and *tantrs*, religious and philosophic concepts are explained in terms of the body and its various parts and functions. Buddhist scriptures speak of the *vajr* and the *mani*; and the *ling* and the *yoni* would be but symbols and signs of the same kind as algebraic signs and symbols in the study of mathematics and sciences. If we see in those carvings nothing but the carnal, and regard them as nothing more than sexual poses and loose loves, we show but our own ignorance and indicate the same sort of confusion which our mind experiences when confronted with Egyptian hieroglyphs

or Chinese pictographs.

Finally, there are the profound philosophic explanations. There are many of these, the Vedic and the Upanishadic, the Buddhist Tantrik and the Hindu Tantrik, as well as streaks and strains, whether of ancient vintage or medieval, which sneaked in from different lands and cultures. Yet all these get mixed up one with the other in that philosophy of philosophies, that of delight, *mahasukh*, and *anand*, of *vajr* and *sahaj*, which converts *bhog* itself into a form of *yog*. In this, one way or the other, all are blended into an elaborate system of thought and a still more elaborate framework of ritual and ceremony. Essentially, however, there are four main planks of the total build-up, and one can attribute the thought to this system or that, according to the particular concept which we choose to emphasise. First, and the simplest, of the ideas is that life and man and the world "are", and are "good", and the wise God made things in his wisdom so that the way to reach Him is the natural way, natural and easy, *sahaj*. Mortification of the self is not necessary, is not required, is neither desirable nor demanded. Go the easy way of living naturally, and regard nothing as wrong or sinful except that which is contrary to the natural way. The second of these planks is the concept of the couple as God and Nature, or as the divine and the human, so that man and woman are symbols of the illusion of division and duality, and their union signifies the essential unity of the Universe. This philosophy of non-duality, *advaitvad*, is a great favourite with the Vedantists who claim it as their wonderful contribution to human thought. In fact, its fundamentals could be seen almost anywhere and at any stage of development of human thinking. Every individual has this strange experience, now of seeming differences and again of seeming similarity, in respect of many things, and certainly in respect of the opposite sex. The duality of man and woman must have got merged into oneness innumerable times before the seers started seeing or thinking. Then, there is the philosophy of the opposites that light and darkness, man and woman, beauty and ugliness are essentially one, since they are but two sides of the same coin, are complementary in the literal sense, and complete each other; indeed, the existence of one is dependent on the other, and one cannot be known except by reference to the other. Fourthly- and this is but a variation of the second--the idea of the world as divine play, as *maya*, the web of illusion, is brought in to explain that the forms are all instinct with the same divine essence, and in the meeting of the *atma* and *paramatma* lies *moksh*, salvation. Add but one more ingredient, woman as the *shakti*, Prime Energy, and all the rest, including man, as manifestation of that, or, of *purush*, the word for both man and God, as the Primordial Essence and the rest, including woman, as the forms; and we get all that we need to justify and explain the *mithun*. All over the universe, and at all times, forms keep on breaking into the elements of which they were formed, the rivers keep on flowing back to the ocean from which they emerged as clouds which, thousands of miles away, descended as rain and snow over the dreaming mountains to which we usually trace the source of our waterways. All this is capable of infinite variations and elaboration upon the theme and, certainly, the whole thing is not straight and

simple. Much intricacy of thought and subtlety of argument are involved, so that the path of understanding and, especially, of believing and practising these philosophies, should be trod warily.

It cannot be denied that for all these loose sculptures, there could be the plain and simple explanation that the period during which these were carved was one of declining morals and degenerate men. The walls of the temples depict a society which, if not already thoroughly corrupt, was fast becoming that. Within a hundred years or so the virile and comparatively chaster Muslim was to find in such a loose-living people an easy prey. Once there might have been philosophic content and religious sanction for such thought and practice. They might have indicated, these couplings of any man and any woman, or of legitimate partners, the merging of our 'I'ness into God's 'His'ness, or the union of the Buddh and his Shaktis, or of the Goddess and the Supreme God. But by now it was no more than following the aphorism that the easiest way to get over one's temptation was to yield to it, that erotic excesses were the secret of spiritual successes. It was degradation and degeneration of the worst order, for it had the semblance of holiness about it and enjoyed the support of religion under whose garb the priests were having a good time of it. The *devdasis* were no administrators to the pleasures of the deity, were not there to serve the gods, but were recruited and retained as temple prostitutes, for the priests for all times and for the wayfarer and the pilgrim when he came and wanted them. Generally speaking, these two opposing views of the matter have been voiced whenever this issue of the erotic Hindu sculpture has come up. It is profound philosophy for those who would justify it, degradation for those who condemn it. We give below what constitutes a fair summary of this admixture of reactions which the average foreigner generally brings to bear upon this matter : "Many are shocked by what appears to them to be indecent sexualism in popular Hinduism. There is at present a tendency among English writers to stress this aspect of Hinduism, and to mention as a stock instance the representation of the great god Siva by the *lingam*. There can be no doubt that this was originally a phallic symbol, typifying the generative force, for it represents the male organ and is sometimes combined with an annular representation of the *yoni* or female organ. There is nothing priapic, however, about the worship. The *lingam* is merely a traditional form of representing the deity, of the original meaning of which few of the worshippers have any conception. It dates back to that early form of religion in which man defied the forces of nature, of which the mystery of generation is one of the most obvious. Its origin is now unknown to all but a comparatively few Hindus, and it is simply a hallowed symbol of the god. There are hundreds of thousands, even among the educated classes, who had no idea that it represented the phallus till they read *Mother India*.

"As regards other indications of sexualism, there is no doubt a certain representation of divine things in a sexual way. This, however, does not necessarily imply either indecency or any glorification of the sexual instinct. The Hindu mind sees nothing shameful or unwholesome in sexual life, which is regarded as a natural function.

This view is carried into religion, in which the very gods are married, and there is nothing improper in their personifying male and female energy. Sexualism may even be said to be transformed by its association with religion owing to the mystical meaning given to it. These considerations should be borne in mind before condemning figures and sculptures in temples which *prima facie* are grossly obscene. It would be unjust to ascribe impure motives even to the builders of the temple at Konarak in Orissa, the carvings on which might otherwise be stigmatized as a riot of pornography in stone. So too with erotic legends and literature, particularly in connection with the worship of Krishn. Here the tendency to mysticism and emotionalism finds expression in the glorification of the love of Radha and the milkmaids for Krishn, which is taken as an ideal of self-sacrificing devotion. It has been explained by Indian writers that such eroticism is an allegory embodying a spiritual truth. In consequence of social conventions the love of a woman for a stranger involves the surrender of all that the world values and is, therefore, inspired by a spirit of martyrdom such as should animate a religious devotee. Illicit love, consequently, becomes a type of salvation. Allegories of this kind are not intended for translation into human practice, and there are specific warnings against their misapplication. Such a line of thought is not confined to Hinduism. The Sufi mystics also made use of erotic symbolism because they could find no analogy more suggestive of ecstatic devotion, and it will be remembered that early commentators interpreted certain passages in *The Song of Solomon* as an allegorical representation of the love of the Church or of the individual soul for Christ. But these esoteric thoughts were little suited to the common herd and, as the cult has spread among the uneducated, it has too often degenerated into infamous license.

"As an example of the appalling depth of degradation to which religion may be dragged by the introduction of sexualism, a brief reference may be made to the practices of a section of Shaktas, a sect in Bengal, whose name is derived from *shakti*, meaning power or energy, which is descriptive of the consort of god. They worship the *shakti* of Shiv as personified in Durga or Kali, and are divided into two sections, the right-hand and the left-hand. The right-hand Shaktas offer sacrifices, mostly of goats, to the goddess, to whom they attribute qualities of motherly love, and are respectable in life and ritual. The left-hand Shaktas, who are a small, possibly a minute minority, are extremists, whose creed sanctions and even prescribes indulgence, among other things, in wine and woman. It is represented that certain things are naturally objects of temptation, and that a man should overcome temptation, not by abstinence from them, but by partaking of them without feelings of desire or self. By a curiously inverted process of thought, enjoyment is to be a means of spiritual discipline. Circles composed of men and women are accordingly formed, of which the members meet in secret, personify Shiv and his consort, and indulge in sexual intercourse. A cult of this kind can obviously be both the cause of, and a pretext for, revolting depravity ; and few will dispute the truth of Monier-William's judgment that in Shaktism we are confronted with 'the worst results of the worst superstitious ideas that have ever disgraced and degraded the human

race.' Decent-minded Hindus are disgusted by such orgies, and Bengali villagers have been known to attack and break up gatherings suspected of indulging in them."[8]

This then is about all that can be offered by way of explanation, interpretation or justification in respect of the erotic sculpture carried by Hindu temples—not that any justification is needed, for those who put it there do not seem to be apologetic about what they carved so freely and uninhibitedly. As is obvious, many of the points made and theories suggested are facile and trivial, and whatever comment or consideration they required has been given while enumerating them. But a few of the interpretations deserve closer examination and further elucidation. At least four of the theses merit really serious study—which means a separate volume, for the fundamentals as well as the superstructures of all these are so intricate and elaborate that the scope and limitations of this work will permit nothing more than what will amount to the barest summary of the fascinating philosophies they propound or base themselves upon. Even so—and now that we have stated all the worst that could be said against them an attempt should be made to understand and appreciate the best that can be put down in favour of these *mithun* carvings.

We shall consider first the interpretation that links the erotic element in art with the worship—prevalent in almost all the lands of the old world and common to almost all ancient faiths—of the phallus and its female counterpart as an essential feature of fertility and fecundity rites. It is a long story but the lines along which human thought developed are clearly marked and follow, if not the dictates of reason, certainly, the straight and simple laws of logic. Primitive man saw all around him but one activity which Nature was furiously and at all times concerned with: generation. Plants and trees and crops and birds and beasts in the forests and the fish in the river and the seas—all kept on multiplying. An abundance of them meant food and nourishment—one great need of man over which he is still as deeply concerned as ever. As for his own species, the birth of a baby was a phenomenon of unending wonder, and as soon as his mind was able to detect the connection between his sexual enjoyment of a woman and the coming into existence of new life, it must have started dwelling upon the matter of his passion for the females of his tribe with redoubled interest and intensity. And, since, due to this reason or that, quite often the crops failed, and the animals and the birds and the fish died in large numbers, and the women would not conceive, naturally, even if gradually, he began to think in terms of some power or powers which presided over and regulated this whole business. And what could be more obvious than the possibility that even as he mated with his woman to produce life, Nature herself was performing the same act of reproduction in the same manner. Realistic in his approach, but a poet and an artist none the less, early man soon created the divinities and the symbols that would satisfy his enquiring mind, and worked out a system of worship of and sacrifice to these gods which prevailed practically in all primitive societies, and which is about the same, not only in regard to the principle but even in details, in almost all ancient cultures. There were two distinct developments, and then two distinct sub-divisions of each of these. As to the form and symbolism, the

divine force of generation was first conceived of in general terms, as sex if one may say so, and not as male and female, whether separate or in union. That is why, as in the Hindu story of the creation, given in an earlier chapter, the *adidev*, God in the Beginning, was neither man nor woman. Later on, so the myth relates, he desired to have delight and created the female species beginning with the *adidevi*, the goddess whom he chased. And so instead of one, there were two generative gods, one male and the other female, and it was as a result of their union that the world and its life and beings could enjoy fertility. From the concrete to the symbolic is easy going, and in course of time the complete male and female bodies were replaced for worship by the organs of generation, the *lingam* and the *yoni*. Worship of these was universal, and has lasted right up to modern times, and science or no science, there seems no possibility of its being given up. In one form or the other it must continue since the awe and wonder of man at the miracle of regeneration have not ceased to be, and the great hunger of love whose living form obtains in the organs of sex and reproduction is still as great as ever. Even where attempts have been made to suppress the worship, the taboos which applied to the generative parts themselves kept on exerting a more effective hold on the mind and imagination than downright worship might have done

Once the gods had been finalised, man set to devising the rites of worship and modes of sacrifice to these divinities. Here, too, his mind followed the natural way first and created the symbols afterwards. Regarding the male and female divinities as joint rulers over the forces of reproduction and generation, he conceived of their union as necessary for these same processes to occur upon earth. And so he thought of devising the marriage of these divinities whenever he desired progeny or crops. The cult of the marriages of the gods for these purposes gathered momentum with time and elaborate ceremonies and festivals grew up practically everywhere. In those olden days, this was understandable, and we find plenty of evidence in ancient legend and lore of these marriages and the ritual relating to them. In countries like India the practice is still very much alive. The second development in this part of the tale was the mode of sacrifice. This took interesting forms, and a full study of these will prove fascinating in the extreme. Here we can only indicate the main lines of development. Essentially, the sacrifice consisted in offering the act of sexual union singly, that is by one pair, or communally in the shape of religious orgies at appointed times and seasons. Initially this, the sacrifice took on several symbolic forms : the signs of puberty like the hymen of the virgin or the foreskin of the male could be offered to the deities at a religious ceremony; or, the first-born, gift of the gods, could be given back to the gods, whether through actual killing at the altar, or through a substitute offering of a goat etc.; and in case it was a girl, she could be dedicated to the temple as a *devdasi*, or her counterpart elsewhere — a practice which gave rise to a whole great institution, that of temple priestesses or-prostitutes, as some people insist upon naming them. Finally, there was the ceremony of dedicating the first coitus to the god, which, for a virgin, might mean a symbolic gesture with a *lingam* representing the divinity or

through an actual union with the god's deputy, the high (or low) priest. In the more advanced forms, of later times, of this last rite, the women would offer themselves freely and openly on certain appointed days dedicated to the goddess of fertility, and in her name, to the men who came to worship at her temple. The money she got was not ill-gotten nor did it go to her, but was meant for the temple, and no sin was involved, nor dishonour, since this was but the woman's gift due, in rightful worship, to the goddess who had given to her the wherewithal for performing the sexual act. In connection with this last we give below two pictures of two different religions of yesterday. The first of these shows the followers and devotees of Baal, god of the Phoenicians. The occasion is the end of the annual seven-day period of mourning on the last evening of which there was a joyous sacrifice-*cum*-celebration in which all took part.

"All through the night the roads were crowded with pilgrims . Among the dregs of the world and the glittering stars there was the spirit of youth marching along the trodden road to the Hill of Promise. There was the unkissed maiden, blushing in her golden innocence, as she was making her first visit to the temple of love. Her heart beat fast in anticipation, like the fluttering bride first leaving her father's roof for the greatest experience of her life.

"There was the lightsome step of the boisterous lad, who, heretofore imprisoned in a tiny village, was having his first, full breath of freedom...His joy lay beyond the pebbled road leading up to the Sacred Hill. There was ..the dreamy youth .. There was the old man, dozing away in his oxen-drawn cart, burdened with memories of happier visits. Another cart carried a portly matron looking wistfully eastward towards the Sacred Hill.. In her lazy mind, she wondered what might befall her on this year's visit. Last year she had been almost overlooked, and yet, there were years when all eyes were upon her, when she was the first to leave the line of women waiting to be selected by the worshippers.

"All during the night the roads were crowded with pilgrims . Nor were they going empty-handed to the house of their god. Everyone was bringing a gift in accordance with his means...However much each sacrifice meant to the particular individual, however difficult it had been to provide it, he was bringing it happily in the most generous of moods. He was offering it to the All-giver, to the very source of gifts—to Life itself ..

"This was the last night of mourning, each pilgrim reminded himself. There, in the temple, the priests...besought the goddess Ishtar to go down to the 'house of darkness, where dust lies on the bolt of the door' and to release from the arms of death the life-god Baal ..

"A marble stairway, covered with a bower of roses, led to an enclosure paved with blue stones ..To this enclosure they all came...with the love of Baal in their hearts. Here they turned in their calves, the first fruits and the ears of corn they had gathered from their fields. Here they gave unto the god the first taste of the bounties that he had bestowed upon them, but they, too, shared in these sacrifices. They feasted on what was left after the priests had taken their portions. After the

fast, the meat of the lamb was delicious indeed, and the wine was like sweet nectar. Food and drink brought them into that state of bliss and oblivion in which they could all the more appreciate the lovely young priestesses dancing ..the dance of youth and love ..Love the god of the universe, Love, ..the heart of Baal.

"The end of the sacrifice approaches. All are weary : Baal, his priests, and his worshippers. Weary, perhaps not so much on account of labours lost as because of pleasures anticipated. Everybody is waiting for the great moment. The final sacrifice is brought...The sound of the flute is heard. It is the signal for the chief priestess to arrive...Again the flute is heard and a bell is rung. The door opens. The Kadishtu appears. All hail her ..(She) places the heart of the lamb upon the sacred platter. And at once the worshippers break forth in song, praising Baal, the god of life, the god of blood.

"From all sides of the room priestesses arrive, dancing across the enclosure and out into the open upon the Sacred Hill. They are followed by the male worshippers with burning faces and devouring eyes. The songs grow wilder, the contortions of the bodies more frenzied, while the drum and the flute fill the air with passionate tones that steal into the hungry hearts of dancer and worshipper.

"The dancers break up in chaotic revelry. Priestess and worshipper join in the merry-making. Tired, drunk, half-swooning, the dancer is still conscious of one thing: somebody will touch her navel—she must follow—but the coin ; he must first give her a coin, the coin that is sacred to Baal.

"As she is trying to seat herself, hardly able to stand upon her feet, a worshipper touches her. She rises as if awakened from sleep. She follows him blindly into a tent, where both priestess and worshipper consummate the final crying prayer to Baal, the prayer of love."[7]

The second description is of a scene far away and altogether different, and depicts the same kind of sacrifice—but this time to a goddess—Aphrodite. Between the two divinities, both connected with the creative and the procreative forces, there was great difference, and the writer who has given the two descriptions points out this difference thus : "There were two ways in which man could realize himself : one was to absorb the universe within him : the other was to dissolve himself in the universe. Baal was the first attempt, Aphrodite the second. Consequently, Baal was the god eternal, but Aphrodite was eternity itself.

"Baal was light ; Aphrodite was darkness. Darkness was at the beginning of creation ; darkness will be at its end.

"Baal-Shamash is a god and immortal, yet once a year he dies, only to be resurrected and to return to life again. Aphrodite never dies. It is she who goes down to the lower regions to find the god and to bring him back into the world of the living. Baal is the living god ; Aphrodite is life itself. Baal is the green leaf, the stalk sprouting out of the ground ; Aphrodite is the black soil that holds within itself the force of life and its secret, the source whence all comes and to which all returns in the end.

"...Aphrodite, the eternal feminine...is both male and female—a bearded face with

full maiden breasts, in female dress yet with a sceptre in her hand, the lingam symbol of the male. Aphrodite knows no sex, but sexuality. They who come to worship her must hide their sex. Males come in female attire and females in the clothes of males. The greatest glory they can bring to Aphrodite, the overpowering devotion to the goddess that only the chosen ones attain, is to physically efface their sex. When the human being reaches the stage in which he is neither man nor woman, then he is in closest tune with the spirit of the great goddess of love

"However, that was the goal of only a few pining souls. The vast number of Aphrodite's worshippers had nothing farther from their minds than to mutilate themselves. They saw another way of communion with their goddess. The sexes in mating resemble Aphrodite, they attain that supreme unity which is the harmony of nature and the creative force of life. For originally life was but one sex, only in time the unit was broken into halves, each longing for the other. When the two find themselves and reunite, the original union is restored, and happiness is born.

"And yet, very few were conscious of these thoughts as they carried their sacrifices into the chamber of Aphrodite. They merely came to her like children calling upon their mother. There, under the roof of the goddess of creation, they heard the call of the creative force and responded to it. There, heart longed for heart and flesh hungered for flesh. And as the call was sharp and the hunger beyond control, they loosened all bonds and plunged head and heart into the sea of love."[8]

Shades of *ardhnarishwar*, parts returning to the original quality of the whole, *yab-yum*, and philosophy of delight; the mother, goddess of creation, the eternal feminine—the ingredients are the same all over the world, and all through the centuries of time. And for the same reason first the "bounds" and "taboos" are created and then, in the name of religion, man deceives himself into doing with impunity what he longs to do. First the control and repression, and then the orgy and the revelry—this is the familiar pattern throughout. The primitive man could have had little compunction in regard to cohabiting with whoever came handy on his return from the day's hunting and other labour. The female would not only not dare to refuse, but not suffering as yet from any guilt complex concerning sex was probably glad to be of service, and might even have enjoyed the encounter. Promiscuity must have been the rule until other social considerations stepped in to control the great fire that burned incessantly within human loins. Ordered and enchained, the raging beast learnt to stay quiet but on condition that it be let loose, really loose, from time to time. Religion, good religion, understands and acts accordingly. Since it deals with human material, it must fashion its creeds so cunningly that while they retain all the semblance of divine sanction, the eternal Adam and the equally eternal Eve are not wholly baulked. This is the fundamental, the rest is variation and elaboration, *mutatis mutandis*, to suit the people of this land or that, or emphasise the superiority of one sex or the other. Innumerable texts could be cited from the *Veds* and other holy books of the East and the West to show how freely the ancients accepted these divinities of the generative forces and how faith after faith

built up an elaborate scheme of ritual and worship connected with the fertility gods. Since religion is essentially a way of life, all theories became social practices, and traces of old beliefs are found in gesture and ceremonial which apparently are far-removed from the ancient cults In several cases the practice has been kept intact. For instance, "even today, in some parts of Java, when the season of the blossom on the rice is at hand, the husbandman and his wife visit their fields after dark and unite for the purpose of promoting the growth of crop."[9]

One point we have purposely not mentioned here, that of women being regarded as having especial magical powers for helping in fertility, so that in primitive societies they did the sowing, and their nudity was often called in as aid to better crops. We shall take this up when we consider the Shakti cult. But this apart, during the last five thousand years or more, there has been no new development in this matter. It is said that when the white man first arrived there, the people of Central America believed in indulging their passions to the fullest extent at the time of the sowing so as to raise the best of crops. And to be able to do that, they religiously abstained from any intercourse during the preceding period. There perhaps the white man's machines and superior manures and methods have replaced the gods and the fertility rites. But wherever the tractor and the fertiliser have not as yet reached, the men and women prefer to take no chances, to speak nothing, of course, of the fun they get in the bargain.

We have dwelt at some length on this explanation of the sculpting of erotic figures and poses on the temples because it contains all the germs which other theories and philosophies would need for their development. Swinging between the rigid limits--they seem resilient enough, but are not--Nature has imposed upon it, the pendulum of human nature moves from end to end, and when one extreme is reached, there is a sharp reaction. Caught between the apparently contradictory pulls of what he deigns to call the sensual and the spiritual, man now swears by one, and, soon after, by the other. His imperfect intellect—imperfect and generally dishonest, so that it is quite willing to side with one or the other of his chief traits—is at times some help in arriving at a sane and balanced view, but is more often either scoffing at both, or confusing and bedevilling the poor human being further by proving that either of the two can be both wrong and right. Living what from their scriptures appear to be sane, healthy and joyous lives, with restraint enough, through worship of some gods, but few inhibitions of the petty and silly variety of the later ages, the Aryans, semi-civilized as they were by our standards, had resolved the conflict well enough. Man needs food and drink, needs copulation both for recreation as well as procreation, is a social animal, must have some kind of protection against the inclemencies of weather and the vagaries of nature; but, such are the conditions of life that ultimately he must build up strong physical and mental resistances, and develop powerful, intellectual and spiritual resources within himself, so as to be able to take on what fate ordains, the gods decree and life brings up as part of our challenges and problems. The *Veds* which incorporate all this are, by and large, good and clean and wholesome thinking, and if we do not mind the names

of the gods standing for the elemental forces, and can keep the same restraints and values even by other means than the *yagya* and *mantrs* prescribed therein, the approach to life which these first books of the world suggest is substatially sound. Rovers as well as lovers, workers and warriors, thinkers and wine-drinkers, the Aryans, caring for their women and children, and doing all this in a healthy, happy way, seemed to have accepted existence and lived it with open hearts and free minds. But then in the course of time, the loose and easy-going philosophy—if philosophy that can be called—of the *Purans* descended and the boil grew riper every day for an incision.

Whenever there is a decline of *dharm*, proclaims Krishn, He incarnates Himself to redress the situation. This once He came along, so the Hindus believe, as the Buddh. It is customary to call him the Wise and the Enlightened ; possibly he was all that. But considering that what he preached, or sought to, has in practice failed to prove a lasting formula for man's living ; that the land of his birth soon repudiated the Faith he is associated with ; and that what endured till yesterday in other lands was not what the Master had propounded, but was, in fact, almost the opposite of his doctrine; it would appear that there is more rhetoric to the Buddh's thinking than understanding of the basic human situation. Renounce the body, renounce woman, renounce sex and procreation, renounce eating and drinking and singing and dancing and all pleasure and merriment—renounce life itself : excellent remedies for the ills he set out to cure. No life, no problems ; all peace. How simple and wise indeed ! If men had gone on following that path, the moon would not be in our grasp today. And look at what the great philosophy of non-violence has done to the Tibetans, and, in a way, has done to the Indians. The Christians have been more sensible. They did not take Christ seriously, and went on doing in his name what, not Christ, but the laws of nature and the exigencies of life demanded.

In fact that is what happened in respect of the gospel of the Buddh . Soon, too soon, and in the life of the Master, it was clear that things could not be as he wanted them. Reluctantly, he permitted that women be allowed to become nuns. Nature must have smiled at that, for the rest would follow, as it did. Made to please man so that God's work might continue, woman is all that was needed, to begin with. As to the plucking of the apple, Eve has always known all about it, where it reddens and how it may be got at . In the words of Browning

*"What so false as truth is,*
*False to thee ?*
*Where the serpent's tooth is*
*Shun the tree—*
*Be a god and hold me*
*With a charm !*
*Be a man and fold me*
*With thine arm !*
*Teach me, only teach, Love !*
*As I ought*

*I will speak thy speech, Love,*
*Think thy thought—*
*Meet, if thou require it,*
*Both demands,*
*Laying flesh and spirit*
*in thy hands."*

With the return of woman, many other things returned. And above all, justifications came along for admitting to the Order of the Buddhists, and to the greater order and scheme of life from which these can never be excluded, that which the symbols of the Tantrik ritual stand for—food that produces energy and desire; wine that intoxicates and, through temporary oblivion of the dull and the unpleasant, makes the pursuit of pleasure possible; and woman, the dance and light and joy of man's world. Banished from the bed, woman now got on to the temple, became goddess, worthy of worship; the sexual act became an act of devotion, and drinking a rite. The Tantrik philosophy was no more than a correction, overdone but necessary in the circumstance of the prevailing imbalance.

Looked at in that way, the *tantrs*, Buddhist or Hindu, are not such intricate stuff as they are made out to be. Once the basic elements are grasped, the rest will be found to be either so much verbiage, or elaboration of *sadhna*, of methods, which, in any case, and whatever the system of thought or of faith and belief men follow, remains a difficult matter, and each one of us has to learn to climb the tree. The Buddhist Tantrik works, like their Mahayan and the Vajryan schools, are high-sounding formulas for sanctifying all that the Buddh had practised penance to ward off. The Hindu *tantrs* were an indispensable weapon to combat the new, and no-longer negative, philosophy of later Buddhism. Each of the faiths borrowed thought and argument and divinities and their attributes from the other, even as, in a war, we learn from our enemies and develop new arms and armaments, missiles and counter-missiles, for ultimate victory. Essentially, the two systems were at this stage of their development so identical that there was nothing left in the gift of the Buddh which the Hindu pantheon could not bestow. In fact, the Buddhist had to take recourse to the Hindu cosmology and mythology for some of the more important ingredients of his new philosophy, like the *shaktis* of the Buddh or the altogether different concept of *nirvan*, not as the state of non-being but as a positive idea of joy, as *mahasukh*, bliss supreme and ineffable.

Etymologically, *tantr* means that which spreads or unfolds or extends knowledge. The pan-Indian Tantrik movement embraced all sects and religious systems of the time. Although there is a vast literature, both text and commentary, on the subject, perhaps the best, certainly the most popularly accepted, exposition of the origin and worth and principles and rites of this philosophy is found in the *Mahanirvan Tantr*. The book is written in the form of a dialogue between the great god Shiv and his spouse, the equally great goddess Parvati. The scene is Mount Kailash, their abode, and our heaven. The dialogue opens with one of those questions, so often found in religious texts, which contain much of the answer. We learn from

the question itself that, though for the earlier and better ages, the *sat yug*, the *treta* and the *dwapar*, other scriptures like the *Veds* and the *Smritis* and the *Purans* were the right dogma, for this age, the *kali yug*, the Tantrik system alone was the most suitable, and liberation was not possible except through faith in its tenets and practice of its injunctions. "Now the sinful Kali Age is upon us", says the Goddess, "when Dharma is destroyed, an Age full of evil customs and deceit. Men pursue evil ways. The Vedas have lost their power, the Smritis are forgotten, and many of the Puranas, which contain stories of the past and show the many ways (which lead to Liberation), will, O Lord! be destroyed. Men will become averse from religious rites, without restraint, maddened with pride, ever given over to sinful acts, lustful, gluttonous, cruel, heartless, harsh of speech, deceitful, short-lived, poverty-stricken, harassed by sickness and sorrow, ugly, feeble, low, stupid, mean, and addicted to mean habits, companions of the base, thievish, calumnious, malicious, quarrelsome, depraved, cowards, and ever-ailing, devoid of all sense of shame and sin, shameless seducers of others' wives...How can men with the taint of this Age upon them, who are ever of restless mind, prone to sleep and sloth, attain to purity of disposition?...O Shangkara, by Thee, too, have been spoken the rites of Vira-sadhana, wherein are used the Panchatattva—namely, wine, meat, fish, parched grain and sexual union of man and woman. But since the men of the Kali Age are full of greed, lust and gluttony, they will on that account neglect Sadhana and will fall into sin, and having drunk much wine for the sake of the pleasure of the senses, will become mad with intoxication, and bereft of all notion of right and wrong. Some men will violate the wives of others, some will become robbers, and other sinful men, in the indiscriminating rage of lust, will go (whoever she be) with any woman. Excessive drinking and the like will disease many and deprive them of strength and sense. Disordered by madness, they will meet death, falling into lakes, pits, or in impenetrable forests, or from hills or house-tops...Say, O Lord !... how without great pains men may obtain longevity, health and energy, increase of strength and courage, learning, intelligence and happiness; and how they may become great in strength and valour, pure of heart, obedient to parents, devoted to their wives, mindful of the good of their neighbours, reverent to the Devas and their Gurus, cherishers of their children and kinsmen, possessing the knowledge of the Brahman, learned in the lore of, and ever meditating on the Brahman..."

Thus solicited, the god sets forth the fundamentals as well as the details of the new dogma. He confirms that men of this sinful age cannot gain purity by Vedic rituals nor the success of their desired ends by the *Samhitas* and *Smritis*. "Verily, verily, and yet again verily, I say unto you, O beloved, that in this Age there is no way to Liberation but that proclaimed by the Agama...In this Age the Mantras of the Tantras are efficacious, yield immediate fruit, and are auspicious for Japa, Yajna, and all such practices and ceremonies. The Vedic rites and Mantras which were efficacious in the First Age have ceased to be so in this...The whole heap of other Mantras have no more power than the organs of sense of some image in a wall. To worship with the aid of other Mantras is as fruitless as it is to

cohabit with a barren woman. No other path is there to salvation and happiness in this life or in that to come like unto that shown by the Tantras which give both happiness and Liberation."[10]

And so, the *tantrs* were supposed to show the way to man's liberation and happiness in this *kali yug* to which the temples we are studying belong. The wrong that could result from following the ritual of the *Panchtattv* was not unenvisaged by the propounders of the new system, as is obvious from the remarks contained in the question Parvati put. And it is quite possible that some of the sculptural representations are a pointer to or a depiction of the excesses and orgies connected with the Tantrik creed, especially with its more advanced and more notorious sects. We shall take up the matter of these *Panchtattvs* presently. First let us have done with the *mahanirvan* offered by the Hindu as against the *nirvan* to which the Buddh had tried to light men's way. As we shall see, the Buddhist of those days was himself trading a new ware, *mahasukh*, the great delight, as against the old-fashioned *anand*, plain bliss, which the Hindu prayed and practised penance for. But both *mahanirvan* and *mahasukh* relied upon woman as not only an ally, but the means and instrument of *sadhna*, nay, regarded her as the very source of all power, and the manifestation of the Highest who, Himself formless and changeless, is, so to speak, passive, while the Goddess, his Shakti, is the activating agent, and therefore Mistress of the living world. And woman is her form, the Goddess incarnates herself in every female, so that to worship a woman is to worship the great Goddess herself. This oversimplified summary of the return to man's world of woman as goddess does not give a true idea of the elaborate Shakt philosophy, nor does it bring out fully the Mother-aspect of the Goddess. She is the Great Mother of the Universe, and many are her attributes and powers. One can never tire of praising her, for she is Brahman, His very Self. But here we are primarily concerned with explaining the connection of the erotic carvings on Hindu temples with the *tantrs* and need not go into all that. What is germane to our examination is the fact that, through suitable and prescribed ritual, the Tantrik could convert any woman into a goddess and worship the *devi* in her. The new system was trying to achieve two things. One was a general corrective, for the new dogma gave to the men of low castes and to women, who were generally denied this, equality in religious rights. The *tantrs* make provision for "all castes and both sexes". Secondly, as a faith based upon the worship of the Great Mother, whose representatives all earthly women are, Tantrikism honours woman. *Striyo devah striyah pranah*—women are gods, women are life itself; thus an old hymn. Sir John Woodroffe comments : "It is because Woman is a Vigraha of the Amba Devi, Her likeness in flesh and blood, that the Shakta Tantras enjoin the honour and worship of women and girls (Kumaris), and forbade all harm to them such as the Sati rite, enjoining that not even a female animal is to be sacrificed. With the same solicitude for women, the Mahanirvana prescribes that even if a man speaks rudely to his wife, he must fast for a whole day, and enjoins the education of daughters before their marriage." And again, "Though according to Vedic usage, the wife was co-operator in the household rites, now-a-days...they

are not accounted much in such matters...According to the Tantra Shastra, a woman may not only receive Mantra, but may, as Guru, initiate and give it. She is worshipped both as wife of Guru and as Guru herself. The Devi is Herself the Guru of Shastras and women, as indeed all females, Her embodiments, are in a peculiar sense, Her representatives. For this reason all women are worshipful . "[11]

No wonder then that woman became once again an essential element composing our world, and no ritual or ceremony would be complete without her. As *mudra*, or for *maithun*, two of the five essentials of the *Panchatattv* rites, she was a necessity for the ceremonial of worship. And the temples of Khajuraho and others like them show her displaying her beautiful body in all aspects of her loveliness, and in postures of love—*mudra*, in another of the several senses of this term. And all is holy, for "women are worshipful."

The attitude to the body itself had undergone a great change. When the great reaction set in, it took note of this vital item also, and due, even an exaggerated, attention and importance were accorded to the body. Just as in the case of woman, or wine, or good eating, or of pleasure generally, the pendulum was allowed to swing to the other extreme, so in this case also, the earlier vileness was remedied by deifying the reviled. The body became holy, temple of the soul, residence of the gods, a place of pilgrimage. Once considered by them to be a source of sin and pain, now it was declared by the Buddhists as well as the Hindus as the "most reliable and effective instrument at men's disposal for conquering death," and "an aid to meditation and liberation." The summary of the new view and attitude is found in the words of Saraha : "Here (within this body) is the Ganges and the Jumna, here the 'Ganga-sagara,' here are Prayag and Benares—here the sun and the moon. Here are the sacred places, here the *pithas* and the *upa-pithas*. I have not seen a place of pilgrimage and an abode of bliss like my body"...and again, "He is within the house,—but you are enquiring about him outside". And, "Some one bodiless is hiding himself in the body—he who knows him there (in the body) is liberated." Of course, the body had to be purified, and made divine, and all that ; and there was the gross body and the subtle, and so on. But elaborate theory and minute details need not detain us. For our purpose of understanding why there is such a splash of beauty and youth on the walls of the Hindu temples of the mediaeval period, it is enough to underscore the point that the physical was no longer disdained ; indeed, there was a new cult on : worship through the flesh and of the flesh ; and the soul was out to embrace the body.

This last is not just a metaphor. It was a fundamental tenet of the new faith, or, rather, of the new development in the faiths then prevalent in India. An essential feature of the Tantrik dogma was the dual aspect of the deity. The Brahman and His female form, His Shakti, were one in reality, but man found the illusion of duality around him and was confused thereby. This was all play, just a mirage, no more ; and as soon as one understood the Reality, grasped the essence of things, saw through the divine mirth, he reached the *Parbrahm* and there was an end to all illusion and sorrow. There was nothing new in the concept, except

that *Prakriti*, Nature, was now associated with the Goddess, and personified as the Eternal Feminine Essence in each woman. Previously, man and woman were, so to speak, but man and woman ; they had to reach their goal of liberation through intense penance, through *yog*. Now, under the new dispensation, liberation was possible through *bhog*, enjoyment, also, for the new godhead was not sexless but half male and half female, a state which was represented and symbolised, *par excellence*, by the couple. And since every naked woman incarnated *Prakriti*, and possessed the mystical and magical essence and grace of the divine female, *maithun*, the sexual act, the sexes in embrace, became a symbol of the union of the God and his spouse, and of release and joy.

But before we take up the question of *maithun*, and trace through its symbolic and ritual value, the connection of erotic sculpture with the new philosophies, we should consider the other elements of the *Panchtattv* ritual of worship which the Tantrik sects followed. *Maithun* is but one of the five *makars* the devotee of the *Devi* needs for ceremonial worship. These five are : *madya*—wine ; *matsya*—fish ; *mans*—meat ; *mudra* (meaning different things in different contexts · parched grain ; gesture and dance ; woman, etc.) ; and *maithun*—copulation.

As is well known, the *Panchtattv* or the *Panchmakar* way of worship is fundamental to all the Tantrik sects, and the worship of Shakti is not possible without these five substances. It is not our business here to defend or justify in any way this mode of *sadhna*, with wine and woman, which has brought such notoriety to the Tantrik dogma and its followers. Yet, in fairness and as an attempt to put things in perspective, attention must be drawn to some points which are often overlooked by those who denounce these practices. In the first place, it will do no harm to the critics to remember that the sacred texts of all the Tantrik sects are profound treatises, and present the Vedantic philosophy, and more, admirably; so that the *Panchtattv* ritual or the worship of women or any matter of that kind is not all that these *tantrs* comprise, and it should not be considered and evaluated as an isolated item, but must be read and understood in context. Further, it will help to remember that the *tantrs* divide human beings into three classes, not according to birth but with reference to their disposition and competence, so that all these essentials of worship acquire different meanings for different types of seekers. Thus, *madya*—wine—is not the same in each case, nor *mudra* nor *maithun*. For instance, in the case of the lowest of the initiates, the wine may be substituted by coconut water and the sexual act by a symbolic offering of flowers, the *karvir* (representing the *lingam*) and the *aprajit* (representing the *yoni*), the two together symbolising sexual union. Democracy or no democracy, people are not equal in every respect. All wise doctors treat each patient differently ; all wise teachers prescribe the reading and the exercises which the individual pupil is in need of. The Tantrik knows all this, and so he puts people into categories : the *pashu* (animal), the *vir* (heroic) and the *divya* (divine) ; and they are required to go in for *achar*, practices, which are in keeping with their disposition—the *tamasachar* for the *pashu*, *rajasachar* for the *vir* and the *divyachar* for the *divya*. Finally, one must not lose sight of the fact that the

*sadhak* has to be extremely careful all the time and the discipline and training are hard. To attain to the state where one is not oneself but the Self, where one is not doing anything although things are being done, where one is not the worshipper only but also the deity—all this is more easily said than achieved. We observed earlier that it was a condition of all *sadhna* that emission of the vital fluid should not take place. Similarly, to drink beyond the ordained amount and to eat when eating is gluttony are not on the cards. *Sahaj*—easy ! Who said that ? Those who know anything about these matters usually conclude that the way of *yog* might have been easier than this where *bhog* is *yog*. As for the *Panchtattv* prescription as essentials of that which is normally forbidden, three points should be underscored. One, that nature would not be cheated. Pushed out through the door, she was returning through the window. Secondly, there is the philosophic ground that poison is the antidote of poison, and the things from which harm comes are also the things which can do us the greatest good. Thirdly, human beings differ from individual to individual. As to this last, we quote a learned exposition of the various categories of men and the ritual prescribed for them.

"For the worship of Shakti, the Panchatattva are declared to be essential. Without the Panchatattva in one form or another Shaktipuja cannot be performed. The reason of this is that those who worship Shakti, worship Divinity as Creatrix and in the form of the universe. If She appears as and in natural function, She must be worshipped therewith, otherwise...worship is fruitless. The Mother of the Universe must be worshipped with these five elements, namely, wine, meat, fish, grain, and woman, or their substitutes. By their use the universe (Jagad-brahmanda) itself is used as the article of worship (Upachara). The Mahanirvana says that wine which gives joy and dispels the sorrows of men is Fire ; flesh which nourishes and increases the strength of mind and body is Air ; fish which increases generative power is Water, cereals grown on earth and which are the basis of life are Earth, and sexual union, which is the root of the world and the origin of all creation, is Ether. They thus signify the Power (Shakti) which produces all fiery elements, all terrestrial and aquatic life, all vegetable life, and the will, knowledge and action of the Supreme Prakriti productive of that great bliss which accompanies the process of creation (The) five (Pancha) elements (Tattva), namely, Wine (Madya), Meat (Mamsa), Fish (Matsya), Parched Cereal (Mudra), and Sexual Union (Maithuna)...stand for drinking, eating and propagation. Because they all commence with the letter M, they are vulgarly called Pancha-ma-kara (or five M's).

"But the Panchatattva have not always their literal meaning. The meaning differs according as they refer to the Tamasik (Pashvachara), Rajasik (Virachara) or Sattvik (Divyachara) Sadhanas respectively. 'Wine' is only wine and Maithuna is only sexual union in the ritual of the Vira. To the Pashu, the Vira ritual (Virachara) is prohibited as unsuitable to his state, and the Divya, unless of the lower ritual kind, is beyond such things. The result is that the Panchatattva have each three meanings. Thus 'wine' may be wine (Vira ritual), or it may be coconut water (Pashu ritual) or it may mean the intoxicating knowledge of the Supreme attained by Yoga,

according as it is used in connection with the Vira, the Pashu, or the Divya respectively. The Panchatattva are thus threefold, namely, real (Pratyakshatattva) where wine means wine, substitutional (Anukalpatattva) where wine means coconut water or some other liquid, and symbolical or divine (Divyatattva) where it is a symbol to denote the joy of Yoga-knowledge. The Pashu worships with the substitutional Tattvas mentioned later and never takes wine, the Vira worships with wine . (and) the modifications of these general rules in the case of the intermediate Bhavas. Thus . whilst the Svabhava Vira is a drinker of wine, the Vibhava Vira worships internally with the five mental Tattvas and externally with substitutes. The Mantrasiddhavira is free to do as he pleases in this matter, subject to the general Shastrik rules...The Divya Panchatattva for those of a truly Sattvika or spiritual temperament (Divyabhava) have been described as follows :- 'Wine' (Madya) according to Kaula Tantra is not any liquid, but that intoxicating knowledge acquired by Yoga of the Parabrahman which renders the worshipper senseless as regards the external world. 'Meat' (Mamsa) is not any fleshly thing, but the act whereby the Sadhaka consigns all his acts to Me (Mam), that is, the Lord. 'Fish' (Matsya) is that Sattvik knowledge by which through the sense of 'Mineness' (a play upon the word Matsya) the worshipper sympathizes with the pleasure and pain of all beings. Mudra is the act of relinquishing all association with evil which results in bondage. Coition (Maithuna) is the union of the Shakti Kundalini, the 'Inner woman' and World-force in the lowest centre (Muladhara Chakra) of the Sadhaka's body with the Supreme Shiva in the highest centre (Sahasrara) in the upper Brain. This, the Yogini Tantra says, is the best of all unions for those who are Yati, that is, who have controlled their passions.

"According to the Agamasara, 'wine' is the Somadhara or lunar ambrosia which drops from the Sahasrara. 'Meat' (Mamsa) is the tongue (Ma) of which its part (Amsha) is speech. The Sadhaka in eating it controls his speech. 'Fish' (Matsya) are those two (Vayu or currents) which are constantly moving in the two 'rivers' (that is, Yoga 'nerves' or Nadis) called Ida and Pingala, that is, the sympathetics on each side of the spinal column. He who controls his breath by Pranayama, 'eats' them by Kumbhaka or retention of breath. Mudra is the awakening of knowledge in the pericarp of the great Sahasrara Lotus (the upper brain) where the Atma resplendent as ten million suns and deliciously cool as ten million moons is united with the Devi Kundalini, the World-force and Consciousness in individual bodies, after Her ascent thereto from the Muladhara in Yoga. The esoteric meaning of coition or Maithuna is thus stated in the Agama. The ruddy hued Ra is in the Kunda (ordinarily the seed-mantra Ram is in Manipura but perhaps here the Kunda in the Muladhara is meant). The letter Ma (white like the autumnal moon, Sattvaguna, Kaivalyarupa-prakritirupi) is in the Mahayoni (not ..the female genitals but the lightning-like triangle or Yoni in the Sahasrara or upper brain) in the form of Bindu (a Ghanibhuta or 'condensed' form of Shakti and transformation of Nada-shakti). When M (Makara) seated on the Hamsa (the 'bird' which is the pair Shiva-Shakti as Jiva) in the form of A (A-kara) unites with R (Ra-kara) then

Brahman knowledge (Brahma-jnana) which is the source of supreme bliss is gained by the Sadhaka who is then called Atmarama (Enjoyer with the Self), for his enjoyment is in the Atma in the Sahasrara. (For this reason too the word Rama, which also means sexual enjoyment, is equivalent to the librator-Brahman, Ra×a×ma). The union of Shiva and Shakti is described as true Yoga *(Shivashaktisamayogo yoga eva na samshayah)* from which, as the Yamala says, arises that Joy which is known as the Supreme Bliss.

"This is the union on the purely Sattvik plane which corresponds in the Rajasik plane to the union of Shiva and Shakti in the persons of their worshippers. It will have been observed that here in this Divya or Sattvik Sadhana 'Wine', 'Woman', and so forth are really names for Yogik operations."[12]

That should give some idea of the intricate nature and the subtleties of the dogma. Quite possibly the erotic sculpture is connected with the Tantrik cults, and quite possibly the sexual postures are no more than symbols, constituting a secret language for a secret ritual, and a code which those who have the key can decode and decipher. And wine and women and the scenes of love-making are not wine and women and love-making, but pictorial lessons in a philosophy claiming vast ramifications and illimitable reaches.

Whereas for a fairly large part of the Indian population, even meat and fish would be regarded as forbidden indulgence, at least two of the five *makars* are almost universally considered as allies of the devil, and all religions have soundly condemned both. Today also, wine and woman are not looked upon with favour by the orthodox or even by the less orthodox. These two continue to be dangerous enemies of man and even those who see no moral evil in enjoying the pleasures of drink and the bed, allow that to keep them off is better. Wine is, in some languages, liquid fire, literally, and, like love, a stealer of wits. Woman, of course, is supposed to have no aim in her life except to beguile the poor fool of a male, and either, Siren-like, lure the ship of his life to the rocks of destruction, or, like wine, convert him into a swine who prefers to wallow in the mud and mire of existence. And yet, both are passionately desired, and exercise a great pull. Because of this power, they have been associated with magic, charms and ritual since the start of the human story. In the most primitive ceremonies for bringing about rain and richer harvests, or for warding off natural disasters, wine-drinking and love-making have been part of the ritual. Man's mind learnt to associate these two, quite innocently, with power, at times diabolical, but often divine in its character. And drawing for a great deal of their philosophy upon primitive thought, the *tantrs* ordained : "There cannot be any *siddhi* (ritual success) whatsoever without wine ; therefore, you must drink it carefully, and make her drink too, and only then you should utter the spells." This is so because in all primitive societies liquor was regarded as "the vehicle of magical power," and "more specifically as an agent that could enhance the fertility of the field." The primitives thought of it in terms of a "life-giving principle." That is why example after example can be found of its twofold use in ancient ritual as the "agent that overcomes death and ensures birth."

The case of the most offensive element, namely, sexual intercourse, is a little different. As with wine, part of its sanctity, no doubt, derived from its ancient association with ritual. Authorities generally agree that in the beginning, and for a long while, women were in charge of agricultural operations. In fact, agriculture is regarded as the invention of women. If this be true then "it is only logical," as one writer puts it, "that agricultural magic in its origin should belong exclusively to the province of women." "Here we have", he goes on, "an important clue to Tantrism. For contrary to our usual notion, Tantrism, too, originally consisted of natural practices in which only the women participated. The reason is that Tantrism had its sources in the agricultural ritual."[13] The leading part which women played for the express purpose of promoting fertility is a matter of common knowledge. "Rain making magic" has always been the exclusive domain of the female, of the witch, or, as in several countries, of sacred women and priestesses. As one authority, Biffault, concludes, "It does not appear that the universal practice is susceptible of any other interpretation than that magical power was originally associated with women and was regarded as essentially a woman's function."[14]

For many people the *tantrs* are no more then "charm and magic". The popular view of the adept Tantrik is that he has great occult powers. To the extent this is true, it is obvious that if "charm and magic" were part of the creed and its practices, woman had to be there as the means for attaining such powers. Once she was there whether as *mudra* or *guru*, accessory or teacher, *maithun*, the sexual act, could not be far off. Nature would take care of that. But where the achievement of Tantrik dogma, Buddhist or Hindu, comes in is in the exceptionally exalted philosophic content of the ritual *maithun*. We have seen how in ancient faiths and cultures the sexual act was regarded and indulged in, whether orgiastically or in single pairs, as a part of ceremonial celebrations connected with the gods and goddesses of life and fertility. Not new to religion, the ritual intercourse was now lifted to spiritual and intellectual heights which, even today, are a tribute to the ingenuity of man's mind and of the flight of his imagination. Whether the *tantrs* are of Buddhist origin or Hindu, or again, of an inception much earlier than either, is a point over which the scholars differ, as scholars will. But there is no denying that through the joint efforts of the Hindu and the Buddhist thinkers, a superstructure of the moral and spiritual value of *maithun* was raised which the base that it stands upon could never have dreamt of. Once the Tantrik view of *maithun* penetrated the popular consciousness, any sense of the fall from Grace becuase of the sexual act, which has troubled the Christian mind and the Mohammaden, could never have had any place in the Buddhist's or the Hindu's mental world. Secondly, there was the idea of combining *nirvan* with *sansar, mukti* with *bhukti*, of liberation with enjoyment. The Buddh had declared the first two as antithetic. The later sects of the Buddhists, the Mahayan, and in that the Vajryan, and the Tantrik Hindus and the Sahaj-adherents presented an altogether new and grandiose concept of their compatibility, nay, of their oneness. The investing of the Buddh with his *shaktis*, or the chief of the Hindu deities with theirs, was

a necessary adjunct—for the devotees will follow what the gods do; children will imitate their parents. Finally, they rediscovered and codified in terms of expert knowledge and exposition the exceptionally high efficacy of the agitation of the blood and breath which the sexual act creates, if we can effect, through sexo-yogic practices and control, proper utilisation of this state of near-churning of our total personality. On top of all this, they wove all this into one neatly tied, even if seemingly subtle and complex, system of thought where all the pieces of the puzzle fitted in most marvellously. The concrete and the abstract have never before commingled in such a superb set-up as they have been put together in Tantrik thought. The *yab-yum* image, the *mithun*, the state of being a couple, was many things, and all at the same time—Goddess and God in embrace, the Adi-Buddh and his Shakti, or Shiv and Parvati, or Brahman and *Prakriti*, or *Parmatma*, the Divine Soul, and the *Jivatma*, the human soul; the Male dormant aspect of the universe and the Female active and manifest as universe; the Formless and the Form. It was the moon and the sun together, or the right and the left; or *shunyata*—vacuum, but with a difference—which was the true state of the Universe, and *karuna*—mercy—which filled it, like the clouds fill a valley, but conceal the reality. Essentially, however, it was a symbol of conquest of the sense of duality and diversity of the world—and faiths?—and of asserting the intrinsic and all-pervading unity of things and the oneness—before and after the material and, therefore, in the material—of that which was and is and remains forever. It is on this basic principle that the new Hindu concept of *mahanirvan* and *anand*, and the Buddhist concept of *nirvan* and *mahasukh* were founded and developed. *Bhog* became a way of *yog*, and, across the centuries, that, which the Hindu ascetic and in turn the Buddh had disdained and denounced, and that which they had appointed as the desirable goal, these two met and found that the ground between them was common, was, in fact, itself an illusion.

Once this was established, the rest was easy. Given eternity outside the bracket, it is of little consequence as to what is put inside: whatever is touched by the Eternal becomes eternal. We still use the proverb that a king can do no wrong. Can a God do wrong then? And since each man and woman is made in the image, and from the essence, of divinity, how could any one of us do wrong? And what, in any case, is wrong or right? Looked at from the height of the Qutb Minar at Delhi, many a big thing looks small. Rise higher in an aeroplane, and whole cities vanish from sight. When man views this earth from the moon, his eye will not see and the mind will not suffer if an act of incest or the atom-bombing of a continent is on. Such is the state of one who is a *siddh*, who has arrived. For him aught is naught, for all is illusion; and aught is right, for in everything—creature and act and thought—there is God; every thing is God; he who performs and she with whom the sexual act is performed are both the same essence; and who is the enjoyer and who the enjoyed is mere opinion, not judgment.

It is an elaborate philosophy, and no summary view of it can do it justice. Combining as it does in one supreme effort several trends of thought, all admirably

blended, it is really difficult to put it in any succinct manner. Nevertheless, three distinct ideas emerge : first, the concept of a female force, *Shakti*, whether as manifest world, or as the eternal essence, and see now in an active role and, again, in a passive one ; secondly, a whole-hearted and joyful acceptance of life, so that salvation, equated earlier with getting away from the world, now became identical with the world ; *nirvan* and *sansar* grew to be interchangeable terms ; and arising from the second, and following logically from the Vedantic view of the essential non-duality of the universe, the philosophy which culminated in the idea of *nirvan* and *sansar* as *sukh* and *anand*. The world and salvation and bliss were regarded as three names for the same entity, and this concept was further developed so as to mean the union of man and woman, since the highest bliss lay in that. The idea of the world as Power is a great and almost original contribution of Tantrik thought. Of the female as such the earlier Vedic and Vedantic thought had taken plentiful note. But the raising of the female to godhead was a Tantrik achievement. In fact, the inactive god himself would not have become manifest but for the activity of the *Shakti*. This was fascinating, this confronting of eternity with what the Buddh had once specified to be zero ; *mithun* could rightly be called the symbol of this strange sum : eternity X zero. In earlier ages, and even from one point of view from which the Tantriks usually judged things, zero itself was one way of demolishing the universe : from nothingness to nothingness—with death as the symbol. *Shav-puja*, worship of the dead, as against *Shiv-puja*, is contemplation of that sort. But now something positive was evolved and made available to convert, by its immortal touch, everything into the eternal. Where the eternal came in conflict with nothingness, the result would be a state of *mithun* without emission, unending embrace, joy everlasting.

Regarded in that light, the erotic sculpture, in general, and the more obscene poses in particular, acquire a different and deeper significance. They come to represent the spiritual in direct confrontation with the carnal. The symbolism of beauty and the beast will also stand for the same concept. Thus the lowest in the erotic scenes might be the profoundest in philosophic value. Indeed, one theory has it that since the sexual act is the culmination of a long period of *sadhna*, it represents therefore the highest stage of attainment.

This conversion of the sexual act into an instrument of salvation and bliss was the result of a great confluence of the river of instinct and primitive dogma and the two streams of Buddhist and Vedantic thought. The Buddhist philosophy of the *mahasukh* and the Sahajiya cult of the Hindus, both based on the Vedantic doctrine of the essential non-duality of the universe, gave it a high spiritual and intellectual content which not only robbed the sexual act, for all time, of its sinfulness, but stamped it as the high-water mark of moral achievement and spiritual attainment. As the idea of *mahasukh* took shape and acquired a significance akin to that of *nirvan* itself, the sexual act, as means and instrument thereof, could not but assume the extraordinary importance the Buddhist *tantrs* give it. It became something sacred, and essential for salvation. Indeed, it was claimed that the Buddh himself "had

set the example; it was by practising *maithuna* that he had succeeded in conquering Mara, and the same technique had made him omniscient and the master of magical powers. Practices 'in the Chinese fashion' (*Cinacara*) are recommended in the Buddhist *tantras*. *Mahacina-krama-caras*, also entitled *Cina-carasara-tantra*, tells how the sage Vasistha, son of Brahma, goes to find Visnu, under the aspect of the Buddha, to ask him about the rites of the goddess Tara. 'He enters the great country of China and sees the Buddha surrounded by a thousand mistresses in erotic ecstasy'. The sage's surprise verges on indignation. 'These are practices contrary to the Vedas!' he cries. A voice from space corrects him: 'If', says the voice, "thou wouldst gain my favour, it is with these practices in the Chinese fashion that thou must worship me!' He approaches the Buddha and receives from his lips this unexpected lesson: 'Women are the gods, women are life, women are adornment. Be ever among women in thought'."[15]

Likewise, the Sahajiya cult, and the Hindu Tantrik thought generally, modelled its philosophy of the love of women and *maithun* on the same dual symbolism of Union and Bliss, Union standing, of course, for Release. In his authoritative work, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Dasgupta sums up the link between the Buddhist Tantrik creeds like Vajryan and Sahajyan and the corresponding Hindu cult:

"This positive aspect of Nirvana as supreme bliss or Maha-sukha was emphasised in Tantric Buddhism and in later times, Nirvana and Maha-sukha were held to be identical. Nirvana is described frequently in the Tantras as incessant bliss, the place of both enjoyment and liberation, changeless supreme bliss, the seed of all substance, the ultimate state of those who have attained perfection, the highest place of the Buddhas, called the Sukhavati.

"Gradually the idea of Maha-sukha began to acquire a cosmological and ontological significance in the various schools of Tantric Buddhism...When Nirvana was thus identified with a state of supreme bliss, the attainment of an absolute state of supreme bliss was accepted to be the *summum bonum* of life by all the Tantric Buddhists. For the realisation of such a state of supreme bliss they adopted a course of sexo-yogic practice. This conception of Maha-sukha is the central point round which all the esoteric practices of the Tantric Buddhists grew and developed."

And, "In the Tantras we find that the world proceeds from the bliss which is the cessation of all duality and which is the nature of the ultimate reality. It has been said in the Upanisad,—'Bliss *(ananda)* is to be known as Brahman, and from bliss proceed all the objects, and through bliss they live and in bliss do they return and merge.' We find an echo of the same truth in the utterances of the Sahajiyas, who say that all the beings are born in Sahaja, they live in Sahaja and again return to Sahaja. The Sahaja is the Rasa, the supreme emotion of love, the quintessence in every body. It is the primordial emotion—it is *Kama* and from *Kama* proceeds everything. There is sometimes the tendency of explaining the two aspects of Sahaja (*i.e.*, Rasa and Rati) under the imagery of the seed and the ovum and the cosmos as following from their union, just as it is explained in the texts of the Tantric and the Buddhist Sahajiya schools."[16]

Let us add, by all means, that our faith and practice are never kept up to the highest standards demanded by the originators of any great idea or creed. May be, therefore, that with some that was gold, plenty was mixed which was dross, and that a part of the erotic sculpture represents the degenerate tendencies which crept in and grew up with time, and which enabled both priests and laymen, both the woman who believed and the female who was wantonly disposed, to indulge in the pleasures of the senses in the name of the spirit. But, chastely represented or lewdly, the *mithun* motif in Indian art and literature can be understood and rightly appreciated only in terms of and by reference to these philosophies which are carved as sermons in stone. People who condemn this erotic sculpture as vile must seek the explanation in these very ideologies, even as those will who see something nobler in it.

It is such a pity that every thousand years or so put man's thought and experience out of the racial mind, and battles have to be fought out all over again to re-establish the validity of truths already discovered and experimented with. Even today half the world is busy, and half our energy is spent, in denouncing wine, love and merriment ; while the other half of the world and their energy are employed in defiant or morbid pursuit of the same. The sculptures and paintings of some of the holy edifices of India express a thousand-year old philosophy of healthy and frank and joyous approach to sex and the senses. Yet they aroused nothing but disgust in the mind of the Christian conquerors of this country. As one missionary put it, in all sincerity, no doubt ,

"The Bible must supplant the narratives of their false divinities ; their temples, covered now with sculptures and paintings which crimson the face of modesty even to glance at, must be demolished ; the vile lingam must be levelled to the ground "[17]

In her own domain, Christianity, reiterating the familiar conflict of the spirit and the senses which constitutes the mainstream of Eastern, certainly of the Indian, thought has caused such havoc to sex that a Lawrence had to shout out :

*"Sex is a state of grace*
*and you'll have to wait.*
*You'll have to repent.*
*And in some strange and silent way*
*you'll have to pray to the far-off gods*
*to grant it you."*

The far-off gods seemed to have granted this state of grace to some people at a far-off time. We, of the modern age, ignoring the camel of actual carnality strain at the gnat of erotic sculpture ! What obtains and goes on in the capitals and metropolises of our Christianity-inspired, West-biased great new world is worse than the lust of the flesh which once reigned supreme in ancient Sodom and Gomorrah. Let us therefore take heed that, in our hurry to judge, we cast no stones—on mere stones, which will be foolish ; or, if that be the case, on holy scriptures presented, for good reason, in the form of hot sculptures.

# 11

# Among the Gods

*The gods are dead? Perhaps they are! Who knows?...*
*Once high they sat, and high o'er earthly shows,*
*With sacrificial dance and song were greeted.*
*Once . long ago; but now the story goes,*
*The gods are dead.*
*It must be true. The world, a world of prose,*
*Full crammed with facts, in science swathed and sheeted,*
*Nods in a stertorous after-dinner doze.*
*Plangent and sad, in every wind that blows*
*Who will may hear the sorry words repeated—*
*The gods are dead.*

—WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY

BUT not in India, where, while man reaches out to the moon, the people still regard the eclipse of the lunar orb as a religious phenomenon, and the government, swearing by science as one of the main planks of the national policy, abets and aids in the holding of fairs and ceremonies connected with that. In this country's ten thousand temples and more, the gods are as yet very much alive, and venerated and worshipped as on the day on which their idols were installed. However, sites like Khajuraho now belong to the domain of archaeology and most of its shrines are, today, mere monuments. There is only one live temple of old, that of Matangeshvar, where worship and ceremonial are still performed actively. The rest, several of which are ruins, are just art and history, the cunning of man's mind and a wonder to behold; no more. And yet, because of their beauty and statuary, these monuments are pulsating with life as few others do. As we have seen, the gods and goddesses adorning the facades of these shrines of yesterday are vibrant with a virtue and vitality rarely to be met with. Indeed, from this point of view, the

functioning fanes, the old Matangeshvar and the new Shantinath, in the Jain-kshetr, are less alive than a dozen other structures standing around. These latter are now shrines for a different kind of worshipper—the one with that everlasting religion of the human soul, the love of beauty and of wisdom—for whom names and labels do not matter.

All the temples, old or new, modern shrines and ancient monuments, lie scattered about a large lake called Khajur Sagar, at the south-east corner of which stands the humble little village, hardly more than a hamlet in size and appearance, which may legitimately boast of the proud possession of this treasure-trove. The shrines stand at varying distances from the lake and in various directions, and the lake and the temples provide an idea of the extent of the old capital. In all, there are nearly two dozen monuments, big and small, whole or ruined, of which eight or nine are of exceptional elegance and deserve detailed study. Since we have already discussed at length the architectural and the sculptural art relating to these temples and since, with an exception or two, the general characteristics of the monuments are alike, and common to all, we give below just a summary view of each monument and its salient features.

The dating of the temples is a matter of controversy ; therefore, the method of taking them up in a chronological order, howsoever commendable otherwise, cannot be followed except at the risk of confusing the reader. Indeed, in respect of the monuments of Khajuraho it is now customary, as it is convenient, to divide them into three groups, locationally : the Western, consisting of Brahminical temples ranged by the side of the Shib Sagar, another, but smaller, sheet of water at Khajuraho ; the Eastern (or Northern) Group, comprising both Hindu and Jain temples, all lying close to the village ; and the Southern (or South-eastern) which has but two temples, standing a little off the main road and the village. Of these, the Western Group is by far the largest and the most important. The Chaunsath Yogini, the temple not typical of Khajuraho ; the exquisite Kandariya Mahadev, and its great precursor, the Vishvanath, the temple of Devi Jagadamba, "dedicated to the arts of love-making", as well as the excellent Lakshman temple—these and several more, together with that rich repository of dismembered masterpieces, the Jardine Museum, are included in this group. The next in importance is the Eastern Group of Hindu temples, rising in the immediate vicinity of the little village, and the Jain temples, including that gem of a remnant called the Ghantai, which lie a little way off to the south of the village and the Brahmanical temples mentioned above, all forming an easterly group. The very fine Jain temple of Parshvanath and the notable Vaman and Javeri temples belong to this group. The third unit, the Southern group, consists of but two shrines, the Duladev, over a mile from the village, to the south of the Ghantai, but worth the trouble of a visit ; and the Chaturbhuj or Jatkari (after the village of the same name near which it is situated) which is over three miles distant from the village of Khajuraho, and placed in the midst of fields and forest. The Western Group contains the best and the richest. This may, therefore, be attended to first.

The round of this precious cluster may begin in two ways. One may either start with the Chaunsath Yogini temple, which may be reached by skirting the Shib Sagar—it lies to the west of the lake—or with the Vishvanath which forms the eastern end of the group and is nearest to the motor road. Both have their advantages. The Vishvanath is one of the main temples and so typical, in all respects, of the Khajuraho School that its closeness to the road is a sore temptation to view it straightaway. But both the historical approach which, so far as possible, should be followed—at least for temples within the same group—and a true appreciation of the growth and development of the temple art at Khajuraho require that our study should begin at the other end, with the Chaunsath Yogini.

## THE WESTERN GROUP

### THE CHAUNSATH YOGINI

Classified as No. 1 in Cunningham's list, the Chaunsath Yogini is altogether different from the typical Khajuraho temple. Built entirely of coarse-grained granite, it is hypaethral—open-air—in design. The oblong courtyard, standing on an 18 ft. high platform, itself perched on a low rocky ridge, measures 103 ft. by 60 ft. and was surrounded by sixty-five cells of which about half are extant. The peripheral cells, all forming tiny shrines, are roofed and surmounted by one small spire each. The middle cell in the south-west wall is larger than the remaining sixty-four which indicate the number of the *yoginis*—female demon attendants of the goddess Kali–to whom the temple is dedicated. This obviously constituted the main sanctum.

The temple is undoubtedly of an earlier date than the other monuments at Khajuraho and is generally accepted as the earliest of the surviving temples. Cunningham's view that there once existed a shrine dedicated to Shiv or Kali at the centre of the courtyard has not been confirmed by any excavated evidence and perhaps what Fergusson suggests may be correct. His opinion is that the arrangement of the temple is essentially "Jaina", and the central pavilion was of wood, like the old *chaityas* of the Buddhist and has perished, so that "it is probably the oldest Jaina temple yet discovered".

The extant *yogini*-images, no longer in their original position, are of Mahishasura-mardini, Maheshwari and the four-headed Brahmani. What rites and rituals, what kind of worship, this structure saw is difficult to ascertain. Commenting on the Chaunsath Yogini's link with the other temples of Khajuraho, and its place generally, Krishna Deva says :— "A few simple mouldings on the facade are all the decoration that the temple displays, but in spite of its uncouth appearance and rugged bareness, it possesses an elemental strength and reveals some basic traits of the Khajuraho style, such as a lofty *jagati*, and a *jangha* divided into two registers. Of all the *yogini* temples in India, this is the most primitive in construction and is unique in being quadrangular and not circular in plan. The three surviving images are massive and squat in form, forming the oldest sculptures of Khajuraho. The cumulative evidence of the sculptural and architectural styles, coupled with the early palaeography of the short labels on the images, indicates that the temple is probably datable to the last

quarter of the ninth century.

Similar primitive shrines, likewise disposed in a row and made largely of granite, have been found at sites like Mau-Suhaniya, Kainri and Shamarua, all situated in Chhatarpur District. They appear to pertain to the provincial style of Pratihara architecture."[1]

### THE LALGUAN MAHADEV

Sporting a damaged sanctum, this ruined shrine is located on the embankment of Lalguan Sagar at a distance of about 600 yards to the west of the Chaunsath Yogini. Dedicated to Shiv, the massively built but badly battered temple is an insignificant item, and is only of archaeological interest. Built partly of granite and partly of sandstone, it suggests a transitional stage after the Chaunsath Yogini, and before the all-sandstone structures.

Datable to *c*. A.D. 900, this temple is usually coupled with the Brahma temple of the Eastern Group. Both these mark the phase when sandstone is introduced but does not completely replace the granite. Small in size and simple in design, the Lalguan has a granite base and once carried a sandstone *shikhar*. A major portion of the last and the portico are missing. The door is absolutely plain. All in all, this structure shows the rude beginnings of the Khajuraho temples as well as of their builders. The Chandels have yet to flourish; then large sizes and lavish ornamentation will follow; and Nandi, now small in size and placed here anyhow, will be sculpted on a magnificent scale and housed in a separate shrine.

### THE MATANGESHVAR

The temple of Mritang Mahadev is obviously the first of the sandstone temples of Khajuraho. In its design and plan, it is an elaboration of the temple of Brahma, but the projections in the centre of the walls and the balconied openings presage one of the dominant features of the developed Khajuraho temple. The ceiling, formed of overlapping concentric circles, and some other items, too anticipate the structural and decorative characteristics of the next phase. But the plain exterior and interior, and the squat, stumpy pillars, without brackets or sculpture, clearly show that it is as yet only a step or two forward. As a result, its design is exceptional, almost Dravidian—being a square (24½ ft.) internally,—while a projecting portico gives it the form of a cross on the outside. This portico facing east, on which side the temple opens, is approached by a flight of steps. In the sanctum, a *gauripatta*, 20 ft. 4 in. in diameter and 4 ft. 5 in. in height, covers the entire floor. On this symbol of the female is set a stupendous and highly polished *lingam*, about eight feet in diameter. This, says one authority, "coupled with the substantial proportion of the temple constituting the grandest specimen of this distinctive temple-type, may suggest that it was perhaps set up by one of the early Chandella kings, and that king may be identified with Harsha, the father and predecessor of Yasovarman, who is recorded to have built the Lakshmana temple."[2] The body of the *lingam* contains two Persian and several Nagri epigraphs "written in indelible ink". Why Persian, and who wrote these, are intriguing questions. The temple is in use and is considered the holiest of the shrines at Khajuraho.

### THE VRAH

Right in front of the Matangeshvar temple is the small shrine of Vrah or the boar incarnation of Vishnu. It is an oblong structure about 20 ft. by 16 ft. and contains a really huge statue of the boar which measures 8 ft. 9 in. long and 5 ft. 10 in. high. The entire body of the boar is carved with innumerable figures of the members of the Hindu pantheon—Vishnu, Shiv, Brahma, Sarasvati, Ganga, the *navgrahs*, *nags*, *gandharvs dikpals* etc. Prithvi's (Earth-goddess) image is all broken and only traces of her feet may be observed on the pedestal which also contains the remnants of a serpent in a devotional *mudra*.

Built as a mere *mandap*, the shrine is akin, in plan and design, to the Lalguan Mahadev and Brahma temples. Strangely enough, it is smaller in size and simpler in construction, although it is of a later date, almost that of the Matangeshvar. But big things are on, obviously. The size of the colossal monolith apart, the lust of lavish carving and the over-all lustre and exquisite finish are sure pointers to the period of Khajuraho's true achievement.

### THE LAKSHMAN

It has been observed that the monuments of Khajuraho belong to three different faiths : Jain, Shaiv and Vaishnav. Each of these three groups has one main temple. Thus Lakshman temple, which is one of the best at Khajuraho, is the 'cathedral' of the Vaishnav group. In plan and size it is allied to the Vishvanath temple, and is, as Havell puts it, "of panch-ratna type, being built like the Taj Mahal on a high platform of masonry with four smaller shrines at the corners of it". The four subsidiary shrines are intact—may be, there was a fifth one, called the Devi temple. The structure measures 98 ft. by about 45 ft., and the four subsidiary shrines are so arranged that "all the five temples open their doors to the devotee who has ascended the terrace". The unified plan follows the "perfected Khajuraho" design of the *sandhar* type, that is with two pairs of transepts. The five components complete the plan of the architectural scheme of Khajuraho's greater temples, while the sculptures everywhere are excellently integrated with the monumental building.

The carving is most elegant. Beginning with the exquisite *toran*-arch at the entrance, and ending with another splendid *toran* which frames the 4 ft. image of the deity in the *garbhgrih*, the interior decoration is a rich affair. The ceiling of the *mandap* is a work of art, and its cusped and concentric sculptural circles "carved internally to represent the mystic lotus" are noteworthy. The ubiquitous woman-brackets and the *shardul*-capitals are "master-pieces of plastic modelling". Other items of note are the *navgrahs*, the nine planets, in a frieze above the lintel which bears the figures of Lakshmi between Shiv and Brahma, and the celebrated scene of the Ocean-churning.

This temple is the earliest among the finer sandstone structures of Khajuraho, and the "elegant and developed" type may be seen in this well-evolved, nearly full-bloomed specimen. And yet, several features place it definitely in an earlier phase. For instance, the roofs of the various *mandaps* sport *shikhars* without any *angshrings* (subsidiary spires). In each case, the straight contour is crowned by a prominent

bell-member similar to that on an early temple like Brahma's. Further, these *mandap*-roofs show other peculiarities and features of earlier times such as tile-ribbings of the *pidhas*, miniature figures of *nags* in *anjali* and the *kalash* with the dropping foliage with which the roof of the *mahamandap* is crowned ; and the *makar-toran*, ornamental arch, here has two loops and is flanked by two gladiators as against the four loops of later temples without flanks. An earlier date is indicated also by "the greater relief of scroll-work on some pillars of the Lakshmana temple and the sinuous grace and voluminous modelling of its sculptures, coupled with the severity of their expression which are reminiscent of Gupta traditions".

This temple, a fully evolved *sandhar* and *panch-yatn*, is the best preserved of Khajuraho's monuments and the only one where all the subsidiary shrines are whole and intact, unless the conjecture that there was yet another shrine to Devi be a correct one. So are its platform and mouldings and friezes. These last, its great friezes, present a panoramic pageant of scenes of every sort, of hunting and battles, of processions of elephants and horses, and other miscellaneous representations pertaining to domestic life and erotic activity. Some of the erotic friezes of this fane are notoriously naughty. But these are more than redeemed by the many lovely females adorning the facades—understandably, since Lakshmi, the spouse of Vishnu, is the incarnation of beauty. In one respect, even its inside is the richest : it has the largest number of *apsara*-brackets which constitute a notable feature of the interior decoration of Khajuraho's temples. Krishna Deva lavishes high praise on this monument :

"With the moving pageant of processional friezes carved on its *jagati* and *adhishthana*, its well-finished and ornate *makara-torana* and ceilings, its *jangha* decorated with two bold bands of graceful sculptures and spirited *sardulas*, and enchanting *apsarases* represented on the interior brackets, this temple ushers in the typical architectural style of Khajuraho and has yielded some of the masterpieces of medieval art, including the three well-known sculptures in the Indian Museum—woman with the child, woman writing letter and woman looking into a mirror—which were erroneously believed to have come from Bhubaneswar but which, from identity of style, material, dimensions and inscribed graffiti, may now definitely be ascribed to the Lakshmana temple at Khajuraho."[3]

The Lakshman temple built, according to an inscription, by Dhang in 1011 V.S., or A.D. 954, is described quaintly as "a charming splendid house of Vishnu which rivals the peaks of the mountains of snow".

The four-armed, three-headed image of Vishnu which gives the temple the alternate name of Chaturbhuj was obtained from Devpal, the Pratihar king of Kanauj and had come originally from Tibet. The central head of the image is that of a man, while the other two are associated with the Narsingh—man-lion—and Vrah—boar—incarnations of Vishnu. The temple is sometime called by yet another name—Ramchandr.

### THE VISHVANATH

This temple terminates the eastern row of the Western Group at its northern end. After the Kandariya Mahadev which stands at the other end of this same row,

this is the most important of the Shaiv group of temples, and, together with its greater associate, "it illustrates the Central Indian architectural movement in its richest and most finished expressions". Being a Shaiv temple, it has a Nandi shrine, located opposite, which contains and sanctifies the god's vehicle—the bull. Both these stand on a common podium and are reached by two flights of steps on the north and the south. The northern flight of steps is adorned by two lions while the southern flight has an elephant on either side.

The Vishvanath temple measures about 90 ft. by 45 ft. and, as has been remarked, is similar to the Kandariya Mahadev, in its dedication and in regard to its style and composition. The stone *lingam* of Vishvanath—the Lord of the World—in the *garbhgrih*, sanctum, has now replaced an emerald image which, according to an old inscription, was originally installed there. In plan, the temple is the *panch-yatn* type, but of the four subsidiary corner-shrines only two remain. One of these contains a *chaturmukh-ling*—the four faced *lingam*—while the other enshrines an image of Durga.

The carving, within and without, is rich and introduces the visitor straightaway to the main features of the Khajuraho sculpture. There are the elegant and charming "woman-brackets" inside, and the alluring *apsaras* on the outer belts. The sculptures include such noteworthy pieces as a woman with fruit in one hand and a parrot in the other ; a woman playing on a flute ; and a woman fondling a child. The celestial damsels are in the typical poses of langour and calculated provocativeness. There is the *apsara*, "steeped in the consciousness of her young, full and perishable body", looking into a mirror and another "with youth in every curve", constituting the very "spirit of the dance". Nor are the loose loves missing from its walls. There are several *mithuns* which are proper works of art , but there are those, too, which merit the censure Fergusson heaped on similar sculpture on the walls of the Kandariya Mahadev : "A portion of the sculptures is of a grossly indecent character—the only instance so far as I know of anything of the sort found in a Saiva temple, that had pre-eminence being reserved to temples belonging to the worshippers of Vishnu ..and the fact must be added to many others to prove how mixed together the various sects were even at that time, and how little antagonistic they were to each other."[4]

The Vishvanath is a great temple, and among the finest specimens of the fully evolved Khajuraho style, *sandhar*—with two Latin crosses—and *panch-yatn*—with the four subsidiary shrines standing on the corners—the temple comes midway between the Laksham and that acme and culmination of Khajuraho's art, the Kandariya Mahadev. It is closer to the latter and might be regarded as a kind of "full-dress rehearsal", a sort of "actual model", a true precursor, anticipating the greater temple, and making things finally ready for what looks like a magic building. This close resemblance may be seen in the basement-mouldings, the general arrangement and disposition of the sculpture, a striking identity of sculptural themes and the essentially similar design of the spires.

The inscription pertaining to the "dedication of two *lingas* one made of emerald and the other of stone, in a towering temple of Siva-Marakatesvara, built by the

Chandella king Dhanga in the Vikrama year 1059 (A.D. 1002)" is a reference obviously to this temple which, "by its architectural grandeur and sculptural grace and exuberance, easily impresses as a monument worthy of a king".[5]

THE NANDI

Standing opposite to, and of the same date as the Vishvanath, is the temple dedicated to Nandi. It measures about 31 ft. square and is built simply—a square structure with two balconies and a portico. The huge, highly polished statue of the bull—the *vahan* (vehicle) of the God Shiv—is over 7 ft. long and is 6 ft. high.

THE CHITRAGUPT

For some odd reason, possibly because these temples kept on changing their 'dedication', and so their names, most temples have more than one name. Thus the Lakshman temple is known also as the Ramchandr and the Devi Jagadamba is called the Kali temple. Similarly this one has another name—Bharatji.

As the Vishvanath and the Kandariya Mahadev are similar in plan, so are the Chitrgupt temple and the Devi Jagadamba sanctuary which lies not very far towards the south. The structure measures about 75 ft. by 52 ft. The temple is planned simply but elegantly and has neither a *mandap* nor the circumambulatory passage in the *mahamandap*. The latter has only one pair of transepts. The ceiling of the hall is designed as a series of diminishing circles.

The temple is dedicated to the Sun-god, Surya, whose five-foot image, wearing high boots and driving a chariot of seven horses, is enshrined in the *garbhgrih* sanctum. The doorway leading to the cella is profusely carved and on the lintel is a second sculpture of Surya. An eleven-headed image of Vishnu placed in the central niche of the southern wall is another noteworthy piece. The central head of the statue is that of Vishnu himself, while the other ten heads belong to his ten incarnations.

The carving on the exterior is rich. The plinth-friezes show elephants' fights, stone-cutters, hunting scenes, processions, dancing girls, etc. Regarding the other sculptures, one is tempted to quote Mr. Munshi's tribute: "The sculptures of Khajuraho can be admired individually as well as in the bulk. In the temple of Chitragupta, for instance, men and women liberated from the niches, stand in groups, on pedestals rising on pedestals. A cumulative effect is thus created as if the gods and goddesses are sporting on the different ascending ridges of Mount Meru."[6]

The Chitrgupt and the Devi Jagadamba are "close to each other in time as they are in space". In point of fact, the Jagadamba is of a slightly earlier date. This is indicated by the more elaborate and relatively more ornate ceiling of this temple. The sculpture is similar in style and proportion to that of the Vishvanath, just as other decorative motifs and architectural features are. This structure and the Jagadamba might be placed between the Vishvanath and the Kandariya Mahadev. According to the authority we are following in the matter of dating, they are both assignable to c. A.D. 1000-25

THE DEVI JAGADAMBA

The Devi Jagadamba, or Jagadambi or Kali, temple is one of the three temples

which stand on the same platform, the other two being the Mahadev and the Kandariya Mahadev. As observed earlier, in plan and elevation, this temple is similar to the Chitragupt temple. Shaped like a simple cross, it is plainer in design and has no *mandap*, nor a circumambulatory passage. The *mahamandap*, too, has only one pair of transepts. The vertical arrangement is the same as that of the other temples in this group : the *angshrings*—the subsidiary turrets—cluster around the body of the main *shikhar*. The measurements are roughly 73 ft. by 42 ft. The fact that there are no Nandishvar figures on the temple show that it is of an earlier date than the Chitragupt.

As the name implies, this temple is dedicated to Parvati whose unfinished image is ensconced in the sanctum. The image is painted black, hence the other name of the temple : Kali. The temple was a *panch-yatn* and was originally dedicated to Vishnu whose image is placed over the entrance to the *garbhgrih*.

The sculptures of this temple have caused much comment on account of the "loose-loves" carved on its walls. It has been characterised as the temple "dedicated to the arts of love". Yet it is not that. The "loose loves" representing "the scenes of the sports of the gods", are confined mainly to the third, the highest, band of carving. The two central rows of the walls, where the major sculptures are located, contain different aspects of Vishnu. The *sharduls* placed in the innermost recesses are in great evidence. Actually, and in spite of being one of the *nirandhar*—without the inner ambulatory passage—temples, which are generally less elaborate and exuberant than the *sandhar* type like the Kandariya Mahadev, the Devi Jagadamba has an "exuberance of sculptures and rich ornamentation". It is to the artistic sculptures of this temple that Stella Kramrisch pays the following tribute : "The vertical panels and facets in every plane are beset with images each on its ancon, and shaded by a cornice or rooflet...With every movement of the eye of the beholder a new perspective shows the images from a different angle ; to avoid being bewildered, he has to concentrate on each of them, facing it, and then give his attention to the next, in the same way."[7]

THE MAHADEV

The small shrine lying between the Devi Jagadamba and the Kandariya Mahadev is known as the Mahadev temple. The ruined temple was dedicated to Shiv whose figure is sculpted on the lintel of the entrance to the sanctum, which last has perished. The portico on the east side is still standing and houses a remarkable figure of a lion and a human being carved in the round.

This attractive and enigmatic sculpture, nearly 5 ft. long and about that high, is one of the finest at Khajuraho. Critics still differ as to the sex of the human being—though there is a greater inclination now to accept the figure, notwithstanding its lithe gracefulness, as that of a man. Some authorities connect this representation with the Chandel's history and think that the lion stands for the beast which the sage Chandratreya son of Hemvati, had killed when he was sixteen and when the Moon-god had revealed himself.

The lion is a favourite symbol in Hindu mythology and art, and represents the

"lordly power and splendour of creative thought. The necklace of pearls stands for metre and rhythm—'Vak', the uttered word". He is also Durga's *vahan*—mount—and is usually placed as a guardian of the temple. Of the artistic merit of the sculpture, Stella Kraamrisch says this : "In this group are summed up qualities by which mediaeval Indian sculpture is conspicuous. It is neither baroque nor is it romantic ; it has nothing to do with Idealism but builds with symbol-elements of form the concrete reality (murti) of the work of art."

### THE KANDARIYA MAHADEV

The temple of temples, the Kandariya Mahadev, stands on the same platform as the two shrines described above. It has already been mentioned several times that this temple is the largest and the best in Khajuraho. Indeed, it is among the best in India. With its perfect proportions and rich ornamentation, it not only marks the zenith of the Chandel art, but represents the culmination of the temple art of Central India, if not of the entire northern style. "Many art critics," says Radhakamal Mukerjee, "and historians consider the Kandariya Mahadeo temple at Khajuraho, the Lingaraja temple at Bhubnesvar, the temple at Konarak and the Teli-Ka-Mandir at Gwalior to be the finest achievements of Indian temple architecture."[9] This is but one voice in the universal chorus which applauds "the magnificence, perfection of design and sculptural profusion" of this "most imposing pile."

It has been observed earlier that the Khajuraho monuments are "as nearly as possible equally divided by the three great religious systems prevalent at the time these were built". Again, in each group of temples belonging to the three sects—Shaiv, Vaishnav and Jain—"there is", says Fergusson, "one greater than the rest—a cathedral in fact—round which the smaller ones are clustered. In the Saiva group, it is the Kandariya Mahadeo...from which the general character of all these temples (at Khajuraho) may be gathered".[10]

The Kandariya Mahadev is a *panch-yatn*, but the four subsidiary shrines are no more. It measures about 100 ft. in length and height, and about 66 ft. in width. Along with the other two temples, this one also stands on a high terrace. That starts, in a way, the impression of verticality which the entire composition is calculated to produce. The word "Kandariya" means a cave, and refers to the abode, in the Kailash Mountain, of the deity Shiv to whom the temple is dedicated. The look of a "mountain of masonry", with its *shikhars* appearing like peak upon peak, is, therefore, as apt symbolically, as it is satisfying artistically.

The horizontal plan in the form of a double cross represents the complete structural arrangement of the five portions: the *ardhmandap*—the portico ; the *mandap*—the assembly hall ; the *antralay*—the vestibule to the cella ; the *garbhgrih*—the sanctum where the deity is enshrined ; and the *mahamandap*—a pair of transepts with an ambulatory passage. The superstructure of each, complete with its *amalak* and *kalash*, is graded in height in a progressive upward incline towards the main tower so as to make the several roofs "coincide in one comprehensive outline". With much clever work of moulding and the arrangement of the subsidiary turrets, a striking

effect of an upward surge, an aspiring ascent, is created which further emphasises the appearance of the mountain range the builders aimed at. Thus the Kandariya Mahadev, above all others, shows how the Khajuraho shrines are such compact architectural units and not a group of connected but separate buildings. Floors and roofs are linked in a progressive upward movement. The successive *mandaps* leading to the *garbhgrih* share a common high base beneath; and their roofs are designed as mountain peaks ranged hieratically so that the Kandariya Mahadev may be regarded as "a perfect balance of vertical and horizontal volumes".

The richness of the architecture is matched by the temple's wealth of sculpture. Indeed, here sculpture is a part of the architectural design, and the bands and friezes girdling the entire structure emphasise, through effective interruption, the impression of the vertical ascent. As in all the great temples here, the perpendicular portion is surrounded by three bands of sculptured figures. There are nearly nine hundred of them "on and in this temple ranging from 2½ to 3 feet in height, or about half life-size and they are mixed up with a profusion of vegetable forms and conventional details which defy description"[11] Infinite pains have been taken to adorn and embellish this temple, every inch of it. The elegant *toran*-arch graced with figures of gods, musicians, *mithuns* ; the richly carved ceilings composed of a series of concentric, overlapping circles ; the lovely woman-brackets sporting bodies of great beauty ; the floral carvings, the *apsaras*; the ascetics absorbed in their penance —there is such a lavish splash here of the silver and gold of sculpture that the plain chamber of the *garbhgrih* with its marble *lingam* really affords a kind of peace and release from the bewildering attractions of the world without.

The sculptures on the outer surfaces are equally fascinating. The carved bands encircling the waist of the structure are a unique feature of the Khajuraho temples. Here too, the central portion of the wall-section is ornamented by three elaborate bands of "life-like forms, shapely in appearance, exquisite in workmanship and of inexhaustible interest, which present a moving pageant of sculptured grace".[12] These include *apsaras* and gods, and *nags* and *naginis, sharduls,* and the *mithuns*, which last include some of the most "shocking", unless, of course, one accepts the philosophy of life and view of religion which have been set forth at some length in an earlier chapter. Actually, the eye hardly rests on this sculpture or that, for the ever-ascending upsurge of the subsidiary spires impels the gaze to rise towards the graceful *shikhar* which is in itself a masterpiece of art. The arrangement of the various components is complex and rich, and so integrated into the texture of the monument that, as Stella Kramrisch puts it, "its surface vibrates at every moment of the day and the clear Indian nights with an ever-responsive play of light and shade, a chiaroscuro of the widest range .."[13] For a moment, even the most skeptical begin to understand, however dimly, the sense of phrases like "the mingling of the human and the divine," "the union of the atman and the Brahman", and sees the temple as a "monument of the movement of the cosmos".

Krishna Deva comments on the excellence of this monument thus : "But what distinguishes this temple from the others is that it presents each constituent

element of the plan and elevation on a grand scale and with considerable elaboration of design and ornamentation...The Kandariya is the only temple of Khajuraho where the *jagati* shows projections on the lateral sides and the rear, corresponding to the projections on the transepts. Again, of all the Khajuraho temples, it has the loftiest *adhishthana* with the most numerous and elegantly-ornamented mouldings, which include two rows of processional friezes teeming with elephants and horses, warriors and hunters, acrobats and musicians, dancers and devotees, and miscellaneous scenes including erotic couples. It is also notable among the local temples in addorsing numerous smaller niches containing couples over the *kumbha* and *kalasa*-mouldings of the *adhishthana*. The largest number of sculptures of alluring beauty appear on the three bands of its *jangha* and represent an animated array of gods and goddesses, *mithunas* and *apsarases* on projections and *sardulas* and *nagis* in recesses, the last forming a special feature that this temple shares with the latest temple at the place, the Duladeo.

"The interior of the Kandariya temple...is more spacious and gorgeous and is replete with a lavish wealth of carvings and sculptures on the pillars and architraves, brackets and ceilings, on the wall-niches and faces of the sanctum. While some Khajuraho temples (e.g., Lakshmana and Javari) show only one *makara-torana* at the entrance, the Kandariya is the only temple which displays two of them, both of exquisite design in the interior. With seven *sakhas* or vertical components, the doorway of the sanctum is more elaborate than those of most of the Khajuraho temples, which have only five.

"Lastly, the sculptures on this temple are conspicuously slender and taller and show the richest variety of *apsaras*-types in lively and often violently-agitated postures. Exhibiting a mastery in the rendering of female contours and revealing a peak of conscious sophistication and exuberent grace, these sculptures represent the high-water mark of the characteristic art-diction of Khajuraho."[14]

The following remarks of S.K. Saraswati may be quoted as a summing-up of the beauty and excellence of this great temple :

"The Kandariya Mahadeo at Khajuraho represents the finality of the Central Indian architectural movement—a consummation of a fruitful evolutionary process—and is at once brilliant in its conception and the most imposing in its perfect finish and grace. Central India affords many other temples of this type, but none can equal it. It fully deserves the high encomium lavished upon it by critics of art in modern times."[15]

### THE PARVATI

There are three other temples in this group. The Parvati temple, standing to the south-west of the Vishvanath, is one of these. It is doubtful whether this shrine was an independent unit, or constituted just one of the subsidiary temples of some larger sanctuary standing around or extinct. The general look of bareness and poverty of decoration would indicate that the latter is the more likely case. In fact, it appears that even for that status the shrine is rather inadequate, so that what we see today is possibly a work of restoration and whatever parts and pieces of material could be retrieved have been joined. Again, and as with several other monuments at

Khajuraho, there is confusion regarding the dedication. At present the structure enshrines the image of Gauri, spouse of Shiv, on her mount, and hence the nomenclature, Parvati. But there is a Vishnu at the centre of the lintel. This latter may mean either that originally the shrine was dedicated to that deity, or that the main temple of which this made one subsidiary shrine was a Vaishnav sanctuary. In passing, it may also be noted that the religious evolution of the Chandel Dynasty was along the Vaishnav/Jain-to-Shaiv lines, and this is evident in the dedication of the later temples. Thus, it is not improbable that an earlier Vaishnav shrine was rededicated to a Shaiv deity. This was done in the case of the Devi Jagadamba, and might have been repeated in respect of this shrine also.

Another temple, in the vicinity of the Parvati and facing the main road, is a modern structure. This was built by the Maharaja of Chhatarpur about a hundred years ago.

### THE DEVI

This temple, belonging to what may be called the Lakshman complex, was not taken up when discussing that Vaishnav fane because of the same difficulty as experienced in respect of the Parvati temple. There is no definitiveness either as to its date or dedication. The conjectures include the possibility of its being a subsidiary shrine. In addition to the other four on the corners around the main shrine, this could have been a separate shrine dedicated to the goddess, Lakshmi. What the four-armed female image now enshrined in the sanctum represents is not certain. With other supporting symbols and attributes, this could be either Lakshmi or Sarasvati. Parvati is usually not presented in this way. The statue could also be the Devi, the great goddess, who came into being to succour the gods themselves. The carving on the lintel of the door leading into the sanctuary shows the Hindu Trinity—Brahma, Shiv and Vishnu—with Vishnu in the centre. Are they all there to pay homage to the Goddess, or to Vishnu's spouse? But one or the other, the general term, Devi, will fit equally well, and to that extent the name of the temple is right enough. In terms of achievement, architectural or sculptural, the shrine has little to offer. The mouldings carry some decoration and the doors are ornamented, but all this does not add up to much. Some authorities regard the structure to be a mixture of some ancient portions, much modern restoration and even new construction. The platform and the roof of the porch, for instance, do not seem to have been a part of the original.

### THE CHOPRA TANK

This curious remnant belonging to the Western Group is located about two hundred yards to the north-west of the Chitrgupt temple. The small square tank, with flights of steps on all sides and a small pillar-supported pavilion in the middle, is of uncertain date. Equally uncertain is its purpose. One surmise is that there was a temple in the tank, and the central pavilion had originally four storeys of which the ruined remains constituted the lower ones. What deity this temple was dedicated to, if a temple it was, is not known. On the other hand, this might have been a pleasure-pavilion, a kind of water-palace often mentioned in history and ancient

texts and still not unoften found associated with the delights of love-making.

THE JARDINE MUSEUM

The Khajuraho Archaeological Museum is located to the south of the Matangeshvar temple and is entered through a fine gateway, itself an exhibit, richly and elegantly carved. The museum was built up in 1910 and was named after Mr. W.E. Jardine, then the Political Agent of Bundelkand

The museum contains a large collection of the Chandel sculpture and is very much worth a visit. As has been mentioned earlier, 85 temples were erected at Khajuraho of which only a quarter are extant. Much sculptural wealth must have perished. What could be rescued or excavated has been collected in the museum and makes an impressive array. The statues include several studies of the chief deities, Vishnu, Shiv, Surya, Ganesh, Parvati etc. The Buddh and the Jain Tirthankars are also represented. The *navgrahs*, Yamuna, *nags*, Balram with a wine-cup, are some of the other subjects. A few friezes and panels depict various scenes. There is the inevitable beard-pulling, and one panel represents a scene of the chiselling and carving of stone, with the erotic thrown in almost for fun ! Variations on the theme of *sursundaris* include the "leogryph and woman" as also a "mother and child." There are beautiful scenes of hunting and combat. Several excellent pieces showing gods, with their consorts, Uma-Maheshvari, Lakshmi-Narayan, Ganesh-Shakti etc., as also the *ardhnarishwar* —Shiv as half-male-half-female—deserve notice. A mouse eating *ladoos* (sweets), a camel with rider, and other sculptures, small and large, make interesting studies.

THE EASTERN GROUP

This group consists roughly of two separate clusters, belonging to two different religions. The more important unit comprises the Jain temples to the south-east of the *basti*—the Khajuraho village. The remaining monuments of this group are Hindu shrines and are scattered in and around the village.

THE HINDU SHRINES

Proceeding from the motor stand towards the village, the first monument reached is the Hanuman temple. A very ancient inscription on the pedestal dating back to the time of Maharaja Harsh, A.D. 922, and the oldest discovered so far, is of great archaeological interest. The colossal statue of Mahavir, the monkey-god, to whom this otherwise insignificant structure is dedicated is about 8 ft. high.

The statue of Hanuman is located about half-way between the Khajuraho village and the Western Group of temples. From there another road leads to the Jain Kshetr, the area where the Jain temples are situated, but it is best to dispose of the Brahmanical temples located in the vicinity of the village before discussing the Jain shrines.

THE BRAHMA

Proceeding along the road towards the village and across its narrow lanes, the temple first reached is the so-called Brahma which occupies a fine location on the east bank of the lake known as Khajur Sagar. The temple is built partly of granite and partly of sandstone like the Lalguan temple, and is undoubtedly one of the earliest

structures in Khajuraho. Stylistically it is different from the typical Khajuraho temples, and is akin more to the square-shaped Matangeshvar temple of the Western Group. But whereas in the Matangeshvar, the walls have openings on all sides, in the Brahma temple the oriel openings are fitted with stone lattices. The sanctum has a pyramidal *shikhar* and not a curvilinear spire. The archaic style of construction is, of course, unusual only for Khajuraho; otherwise, it is a familiar form of the *mandap*, hall, which is quite common in different parts of India.

The four-faced image enshrined within is not a Brahma but a *shivlingam*, and the name of the temple is therefore incorrect, even though it is the currently accepted one.

THE VAMAN

About a furlong to the north-east of the Brahm temple is the Vaman temple. This is the most important of this sub-division, the Brahmanical temples, in the Eastern Group. The measurements are approximately 63 ft. by 45 ft. Standing on a rather high podium, it is planned like the Devi Jagadamba and Chitrgupt temples, but is better built. The superstructure of the *shikhar* is of the usual curvilinear form but there are no subsidiary turrets. The temple is dedicated to the Vaman (Dwarf) incarnation of Vishnu and the enshrined image is 4 ft. 8 inches high—which is not so dwarfish ! The framework of the sanctum carries, among other sculptures, a Buddh in the *bhumisparshmudra*—the earth-touching posture. In the niches around the *garbhgrih* are carved, in the upper row, the deities Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiv, with their divine consorts, and, in the lower, some of the incarnations of Vishnu.

The outer walls bear two sculptured bands, and not three. On these, Benjamin Rowland's comment will bear repetition : "Typical of the veritable flowering of temple sculpture during the final period of Hindu architecture in Central India is the ornamentation of the Vaman Temple at Khajuraho. We look upon a double tier of naked apsaras in a celestial chorus, vaunting their voluptuous charms in an infinite variety of attitudes displaying a 'languid and calculated eroticism', rendered the more provocative by the contrast between the slim bodies and the towering complication of the head-dresses. These dancers in the heaven of Indra are, according to legend, creatures not made of gross flesh but constituted rather of the air and the movements that compose their heavenly dances : they are here as appropriate entertainers in the reconstructed heaven that is the fabric of the sanctuary. Although ostensibly only so many spots or accents in the total decoration of the facade they have an irresistible individual attraction...Each figure carved almost in the complete round stands on its own platform and is shaded by an individual canopy. .The celestial maidens possess a great variety expressed in their tourtuous movements and the provocative warmth and fullness of the modelling of their flesh...The roundness and softness of the breasts and belly are emphasised by the contrasting exaggerated straightness of the arms and limbs."[15]

And yet, in strange contrast to the other developed local temples, there are no erotic scenes except in the subsidiary niches of the roof-pediments. The Vaman has

other noteworthy features: the top row of the *jangha* shows niches containing diamonds instead of sculptures ; and there are *salbhanjika*-brackets on the ceilings of the balconied openings of the *mahamandap* transepts.

On account of several structural and stylistic characteristics, like the squat and massive proportion of the pillars, the diamonds in the niches mentioned above, and the headgear of the *apsaras*, this monument can be dated as coming after the Kandariya Mahadev and before the Adinath temple of the Jain group.

### THE KHAKRA

All round here there are several mounds and ruins marking the site of ancient monuments. There must have been several of these. One such known as the Khakra lies about six furlongs away, to the east of the Vaman. This Vaishnav shrine is a veritable ruin, and only the entrance to the sanctum and the four pillars of the transepts may be seen now.

### THE JAVARI

The small but finely-proportioned and well-knit temple known as the Javari, is located close to the north-east of the village. It measures about 39 ft. by 21 ft. and consists of but three components : the *ardhmandap*, the *mahamandap* and the sanctum. The temple is dedicated to the four-armed Vishnu.

The superstructure has the typically rich, cluster-pine effect. The finely carved exterior sculptures consist of two bands sporting, among others, *devangnas*—celestial damsels—in attractive postures.

Chronologically, the Javari falls between the Adinath of this group and the Chaturbhuj temple of the Southern Group, which latter it resembles in respect of general plan and design. Krishna Deva calls it a "gem of architecture ..remarkable as much for its ornate *makara torana* as for the slender and soaring outline of its *sikhara*". It has two significant features which stamp it as unique among the temples of Khajuraho. In the words of the same authority, "the crowning mouldings of its *jangha* show the *bharani* (pillar-capital) and *kapota* surmounted by a prominent *kuta-chhadya*, which is characteristic of the medieval temples of Gujarat. Secondly, the gods on the lower row of the *jhanga* are placed here in a niche framed by circular pilasters crowned by a diamond and canopied by a *torana*-arch. This feature is also found on the medieval temples of Gujarat, but the nearest analogy is provided by the Udayesvara temple at Udaipur (1059-80) and the larger Sas-bahu temple at Gwalior (1093)."[16] The affinity with the last two further helps in placing the temple between A.D. 1075-1100.

The *apsaras* of this temple, at least many of them, may be recognised with reference to their *mekhla*—necklace— which has a double series of pendant loops.

## THE JAIN TEMPLES

### THE GHANTAI

From the point of bifurcation near Hanuman's statue, a path leads southwards to the Jain Kshetr—where the Jain temples stand. The first one reached is the Ghantai, so called from the "bell-and-chain" design of the carving on its elegant pillars. The monument is today a mere fragment, but its classic appearance and its embellishment are of such superb quality that it constitutes one of the foremost

**attractions of the place.**

**Basing his opinion on a** Buddh image he had found in the vicinity **and** on **a short Buddhist** inscription, Cunningham had at first ascribed the shrine to Buddhism. **The later discovery of** Digambar Jain images has confirmed Fergusson's view that it is a **Jain temple** for "the slender pillars and the plan of the building are very similar to those that are certainly Jaina."

The plan of the building, now a "skeleton without flesh", is similar to that of the Parshvanath temple. The pillars are so arranged that they form a portico—the *ardhmandap* and the *mahamandap*—beyond which lay, no doubt, the porch and the sanctum—the *antralay* and the *grabhgrih*—all enclosed by a common ambulatory passage. The remnant of the ceiling of the *ardhmandap*, portico, shows a series of panels, forming the border, which depict parties of dancers, and of musicians performing on different instruments.

But what attracts and holds the eye is the group of pillars. These, says Fergusson, "are singularly graceful in their form and elegant in their details, and belong to a style which if there were more examples of it, I would feel inclined to distinguish as the 'Gupta Style'." The building struck him as "remarkable for its extreme elegance, even at Khajuraho!" and was but "an instance of that profusion of labour which the Hindus loved to lavish on the temples of their gods." Indeed, "in the beauty of their form and proportions and the chasteness of their ornamentation they (these pillars) evince almost a classical dignity."[17]

As has been mentioned already, the temple derives its name from the "bell-and-chain" ornaments carved on the pillars. The *kirtimukhs* from whose mouths hang these festoons of pearls and bells are splendid specimens of the sculptor's art. The interlaced girdles and semi-circles contain figures of ascetics and demi-gods and at the entrance to the temple is the image of an eight-armed Jain goddess riding a Garud and flourishing various weapons. Other friezes and sculptures depict the Jain Tirthankars and the *navgrahs*, the nine planets, and the sixteen dreams of Mahavir's mother.

In the opinion of Krishna Deva, this structure "was essentially of the same design as the Parsvanatha temple but was grander in conception and nearly twice as large in dimensions." Basing his view on this similarity between the two and considering that "of the two, the Ghantai appears to be larger and slightly more evolved, and consequently, perhaps, little later", the same authority dates it towards the end of the tenth century.

Today, a thousand years later, this "fragmentary shell" is the most gracious of Khajuraho's ruins, and its classic look is apt to make one think of Byron's lines in his *Siege of Corinth* :

> *"There is a temple in ruin stands,*
> *Fashion'd by long-forgotten hands;*
> *Two or three columns ..*
> *Out upon Time! it will leave no more*
> *Of the things to come than the things before!*

*Out upon Time! who for ever will leave*
*But enough of the past for the future to grieve. .*
*Remnants of things that have pass'd away,*
*Fragments of stone rear'd by creatures of clay!"*

THE PARSHVANATH

The group of Jain temples proper lies within a modern enclosure and consists chiefly of the Adinath, the Parshvanath and the Shantinath. Of these the first two are more important; the last, the Shantinath, is a modern temple though it contains some ancient Jain sculptures. But before any of these Jain temples are examined, their general characteristics may be summed up.

Fergusson has remarked that the temples at Khajuraho are, irrespective of the sect to which they belong, usually "so like one another that it requires very great familiarity to distinguish them. It looks as if all had been built by one prince, and by some arrangement that neither sect should surpass or be jealous of the other. We lose here all the peculiarities we usually assign to Jaina temples of this age. The Vimana or Sikra is more important than the porch. There are no courtyards with circumambient cells, no prominent domes, nor, in fact, anything that distinguishes the Jaina from Hindu architecture. If not under the sway of a single prince, they must have been erected in an age of extreme toleration, and when any rivalry that existed must have been among the architects in trying who could produce the most beautiful and most exquisitely adorned building."[18]

These remarks apply especially to what Fergusson calls the 'Cathedrals'—the Kandariya Mahadev, the Lakshman, and the Parshvanath which among the Jain temples is at once the holiest and the "most exquisitely adorned". Located between the Shantinath temple and the Adinath, which is at the northern end of the enclosure, it measures approximately 68 ft. by 35 ft.—not a very large structure. The plan is that of a three-component unit, with an additional shrine. Its three chambers, the *mahamandap*, the *antralay* and the *garbhgrih*, form a compact mass and are surrounded by a common ambulatory passage. The small shrine at the back, behind the sanctum, is a deviation. Another distinguishing feature, different from the characteristics of the Brahmanical temples, is the absence of those beautiful balconied openings which, in temples like the Kandariya Mahadev, provide light as well as architectural ornament. Here the first purpose, that of admitting light has, been served by introducing perforated windows. The absence of balconied openings has, however, necessitated the placing of three bands of sculptures which go round the zone of the wall-section, one right above the other without intervening spaces, which has created the effect of overcrowding. To quote S.K. Saraswati, "the lack of contrast between the solids and the voids, that constitutes a striking and pleasing characteristic of the Khajuraho temples, gives the Parashvanatha a monotonous and over-burdened appearance which its exuberant wealth of sculptural elegance can hardly compensate for."[19]

But for that slight defect the construction is well-nigh flawless. The *shikhar* is in the typical style, with a number of replicas of small turrets emphasising the rich

compactness and the vertical ascent of the superstructure.

But excellent as the architectural aspect is, the workmanship and sculpture are almost perfect. If the Kandariya Mahadev has greater architectonic merit, the Parshvanath has greater and more elegant sculpture.

In addition to the exquisitely carved ceiling of the portico from whose centre hangs a pendant, carved in chain and floral patterns, and supporting two intertwined flying figures, the interior displays several other masterpieces of art. On the outer walls of the sanctum there are *apsaras* which represent the highest achievement of the Chandel sculptors. "Carved with astonishing delicacy and vigour, and rendered with masterly accuracy and precision", they are marvellous work. The figures of a nymph writing a letter, or of a woman fondling a child, of a damsel extracting a thorn and of yet another, engaged in toilet, and another, a celestial female, applying lac-dye to her foot—all these excel, in their provocative loveliness, any other sculpture in Khajuraho. Nor is the decoration on the facade, the three bands of lavish sculpture that encircle the waist, any the less rich. In fact, the entire temple is so exquisitely wrought that, in the words of Fergusson, "there is nothing probably in Hindu architecture that surpasses the richness of its three-storeyed base combined with the extreme elegance of outline and delicate detail of the upper part." Indeed, each piece seems to have been rendered with infinite labour. Of one sculpture, an *apsara*, of this temple Stella Kramrisch speaks glowingly : "No greater fitness of sculpture, wall and space can be found in Khajuraho. Mediaeval power of movement and ancient Indian 'naturalism' are amalgamated in the perfection of this sculpture."[20] And there are many such which deserve equally high praise.

The statue of Parshvanath, gracing an ornamental throne with a carved bull in front, was installed in the sanctum about a hundred years ago, in 1860. Originally, the temple was dedicated to Jin Risabhnath (Adinath), the first Tirthankar, as the figure of the bull referred to above would indicate. Other Jain sculptures include the ten-armed Jain goddess riding on a *garud*, carved on the entrance door, and several seated and standing figures adorning the lintel of the sanctum. The outer wall supports, in addition to more Jain Tirthankars, statues of Brahmanical gods and goddesses. Among these last may be mentioned a Shiv in the *abhangmudra* and Balram and Revati—the Vaishnav god and his spouse—in a close embrace. This peculiar feature of the Brahmanical gods being freely interspersed with Jain Tirthankars speaks volumes for the spirit of toleration which seems to have obtained in the country during the time of the Chandels.

The Parshvanath is a glorious temple and vies with the very best in Khajuraho. "If we compare the Parshvanath with Kandariya Mahadeo", says Fergusson, "we cannot but admit that the former is by far the most elegant"...and it proves, if any thing does, that like the Hindu, the Jain also thought that "infinite labour bestowed on every detail was the mode in which,. he could render his temple most worthy of the deity."[21]

On the strength of sculptural, architectural and inscriptural evidence, authorities generally regard this temple as a "close successor" of the Lakshman temple. There

are numerous stylistic affinities like a frieze of projecting elephants, similar doorways, the predominance of Vaishnav themes on a Jain temple, the same type of broad-hipped *apsaras*, and the sculptures "approximating those of the Lakshmana in voluminous modelling and general treatment, including the style of head-dress." But the Parshvanath is a step forward towards greater elegance and elaboration. The encircling sculptural bands are increased to three instead of two and the figures show better poise and proportion. Krishna Deva believes that the "affinity in sculptural style and theme between the Parshvanath and Lakshmana temples definitely indicates their chronological propinquity", and places it A.D. 950–70, "during the early part of Dhanga's reign."[22]

### THE ADINATH

The temple of Adinath stands close to, and to the north of, the Parshvanath. It is a small structure, and the portico is a modern addition. The sanctum enshrines not the original but a much later image of the Tirthankar Adinath. A four-armed Jain goddess is placed over the entrance to the *garbhgrih*, and sculptured all around, are other Jain goddesses and Jain symbols. Under the curvilinear *shikhar*, where the balcony over the portico meets it, there are three continuous bands of sculpture going all round the temple. A belt of niches containing *kirtimukhs* etc., adorns the base of the *shikhar* over the *antralay*. The sculptures include some attractive dancing *apsaras*, "appropriate entertainers in the reconstructed heaven", which a temple is supposed to be.

As was mentioned in connection with the Vaman temple, the Adinath bears a close resemblance to that Brahmanical temple with regard to the general plan and design as well as its elegant sculpture. Because of the better proportions of its *shikhar*, which is not as heavy and squat as that of the Vaman, and some difference in ornamentation, this temple appears to be the more evolved, and of slightly later construction—may be a decade or two—than the Hindu shrine. Thus, the Lakshman and the Parshvanath on the one hand, and the Vaman and the Adinath on the other, make two of the strangest pairs of temples, belonging to rival faiths, going hand in hand in time and style and space. Toleration indeed !

### THE SHANTINATH

This modern Jain temple located to the south of the Parshvanath is important chiefly because of the huge 14 ft. high Jain image of a Tirthankar—possibly Rishabhhdev Adinath, because of the *rishabh* bull carved on the pedestal. The temple houses a few other ancient Jain sculptures including a group of Jain gods and goddess in *raj-lilasan*.

## THE SOUTHERN GROUP

This unit consists of two temples. Of these the more important is the Duladev temple which is located to the south of the Ghantai and not very far from it ; but the other, the Chaturbhuj, is of an earlier date.

### THE CHATURBHUJ OR JATKARI

This monument, belonging to the Southern Group of the Khajuraho temples, is rather difficult of access. It is situated far in the fields, about two miles from the

village of Khajuraho and three furlongs to the south of Jatkari village which has given it its alternate name.

The temple is planned like the Adinath Jain temple and consists of three components, the *ardhmandap*, the *mahamandap* and the sanctum to which one descends down a few steps. The deity enshrined is Vishnu whose colossal four-armed, 9 ft. image stands within. The image is richly adorned with a crown and other ornaments. Two of the hands are broken ; of the other two, the upper ones, the right hand is lifted in *abhaiymudra* and has a circular mark on the palm ; the left holds a stalk of lotus and a book tied with a string.

The curvilinear *shikhar*, complete with an *amalak* and a crown, is plainly designed ; there are no elaborate replicas of spires, no turrets, no miniature towers. But the three sculptural bands constituting the exterior embellishment are there. Of the principal figures, a lion-headed female on the north is perhaps the Shakti or the female counterpart of Narsingh, the man-lion incarnation of Vishnu. A four-armed figure of Shiv and another image of the same deity in the *ardhnarishwar*—half-male half-female—aspect are two other noteworthy pieces. The other sculptures serve as formal ornament, no more.

Dedicated to a peculiar form of Vishnu, this is the only sandstone temple at Khajuraho which carries no erotic sculpture. Whether this has any relation to that fact or not, but the temple's sculptural art indicates a definite decline. "The ornaments are only sketchily represented, the details being left unfinished. The representations of animal mounts are crude and insipid. The sculptures, including those of *apsarases*, are stereotyped and without much life or expression, the only exception being the *vidyadhara*-figures, which are represented in lively poses. Thus, in plastic theme and style this temple comes closest to and cannot be far in date from the latest temple of Duladev, with which it shares a few typical ornaments."[23] Because of all this the Chaturbhuj temple may be placed between the Javari and the Duladev, and dated *c.* A.D. 1100.

## THE DULADEV

This temple is one of the finest at Khajuraho and offers some of the choicest sculptures, especially the *shalbhanjika* (woman-and-tree) studies.

The temple measures roughly 69 ft. by 40 ft. and its plan consists of the fully developed five-chamber arrangement. There is, however, no circumambulatory passage, and the ceiling of the *mahamandap* is rather curiously designed as a series of diminishing circles of overlapping stones. The image of Shiv on the lintel of the entrance to the *garbhgrih* indicates the dedication. At present the sanctum contains not an image of the god but a *shivlingam*.

The superstructure is in the usual style, with several turrets clustering about and around the central spire. There are also the three bands of sculptures encircling the wall portion below the base of the *shikhar*. And, of course, there are other sculptures in the interior of the temple.

But what sculptures !

"The masters of Duladeo temple worked on a high level of inspiration", remarks

Stella Kramrisch. Indeed, whether one examines the "superb grace and elegance" of the *shalbhanjika*—the woman-and-tree—bracket-capitals of the *mahamandap*, or the glory of the breathing bodies of the *apsaras* on the pilasters of the *ardhmandap*, or, again, the squat forms of the living four-armed *gans* which provide the contrasting element—the ugly against the lovely—the masterly touch is ever apparent. The outside ornamentation is equally rich. Of special note are the *vidyadhars* which occupy the highest of the three belts of sculptures. "The images of these wizards are carved flying singly and flying in pairs, with their consorts. They carry weapons and garlands, brandish swords, play on musical instruments, carry dance in their hands, flight in their legs, and sentiment or detachment in their faces. Their form is of the purest mediaeval cast, on the high level of serenity..."[24] And even as these figures, "alike to angels", are a part of the population of heaven, the others, the gods and the *apsaras*, are not missing either.

The eight-armed image of Surya-Brahma-and-Shiv is but one evidence of the divine presence. There are others to see the dance celestial of the celestial damsels who grace these walls.

A few *mithuns*—including one or two of the "shocking" variety—provide what seems to be one of the essential ingredients of Khajuraho's greater temples and thus put the final stamp of excellence on this monument. The word *vasal* (or *vasar* ?) inscribed in different places seems to indicate the name of the leading sculptor, and one wonders what he meant by making the gross a part of the graces of the temple.

The name of the temple, Duladev—the Divine Bridegroom,—is today the familiar name, although Cunningham called it the 'Kunwar Math'.

Of the extant temples of Khajuraho, the Duladev was the last to be built. In respect of both its architecture and its sculpture it presents a peculiar blending of traits which are distinctive and unique for Khajuraho, and trends which mark a definite decline. Its individual features and inferior figures create an uneven work of art. Although set off by some exquisite touches, the stylisation and conventionalisation of the structural and decorative elements may yet be seen clearly. As Krishna Deva points out, "while the dancing *apsarases* of its interior and the flying *vidyadharas* on the top row facades show vigorous tension and dynamic movement its sculptures are generally stereotyped and overburdened with ornamentation. This is strikingly illustrated by the elaborately-crowned and ornamented *apsarases* forming the brackets of the *maha-mandapa* and *ardha-mandapa* and by the river-goddesses standing under umbrellas decorated with pompons. While some figures on this temple are of exceptional artistic merit, the plastic treatment has, on the whole, become fluid and in many cases lacks depth of relief, which is evident on a majority of the *apsaras* figures of the exterior."

And "the facades of this temple carry tedious repetitions of the images of standing Siva and Siva-Parvati. The repetition *ad nauseam* of the same images with identical attributes is a glaring departure from the decorative scheme followed in other Khajuraho temples and bespeaks a poverty of ideas and an artistic degeneration.

"Thus", he concludes, "plastically and iconographically, this temple marks the exhaustion of the remarkable vitality for which the Khajuraho sculptures are justly famous, and its peculiarities, both sculptural and architectural, are such that it could be placed only at the end of the fine series of the Khajuraho temples. The above consideration, combined with the advanced proto-Nagari characters of its graffiti, indicate that this temple cannot be dated earlier than *circa* 1100 and may reasonably be assigned to 1100-50."[25]

The conjecture in respect of the date fits in rightly with the history of the Chandels of Khajuraho. After several weak-kneed rulers, Madanvarman had ascended the throne, and a glow of revived glory was visible. This temple seems to mark that period of brief candles. After him, the great Parmardidev might have been expected to build greatly, but his reign was one of battle and strife, and with no successes for which the gods had to be thanked in terms of temples and sanctuaries. In any case, Khajuraho was no longer the centre of power and the seat of government. The places which counted were Mahoba and Kalinjar, and Parmardidev is more associated with the former than with Khajuraho. No faith, no fortune ; no temples dedicated to the powers that be, and no treasures nor renown and glory will they bestow—such appears to have been the case. Or, was it *vice versa*? Anyway, the fact remains that as they moved away from Khajuraho, and the building of their temples came to an end, the Chandel power and prestige declined rapidly and the dynasty ceased to matter.

# 12

# One Word More

*In the elder days of Art,*
*Builders wrought with greatest care,*
*Each minute and unseen part ;*
*For the Gods see everywhere.*
*Let us do our work as well,*
*Both the unseen and the seen ;*
*Make the house, where Gods may dwell,*
*Beautiful, entire and clean.*
*Else our lives are incomplete....*

—THE BUILDERS : H.W. LONGFELLOW

THE thousand-year old story of the Moon-descended Chandels and their temples comes to a close. We have wandered long in the corridors of Time and seen how the institutions and ideas of men take shape, and what remains of their thoughts and deeds, and what passes away. Today, as Man prepares to probe outer space where the gods once were, he does not take the legends of ancient times seriously, and tends to ignore all that art and history have recorded. And yet a thousand years are but a drop in the Ocean of Time, and just as, today, we sit in judgement on the Past, so, tomorrow, only a thousand years hence, others of our species may examine what we create and leave behind us as our gift to posterity.

Will they find something which they will like to look at, and admire, and discuss the import and meaning of? Something like, say, the temples of Khajuraho ?

Of course, each age builds, and rightly, in its own image. It is neither necessary nor expected that we should do that which the men of yesterday did. They sang their songs and thought their thoughts, wrote their books and constructed their buildings—and we shall sing our own songs and think our own thoughts,

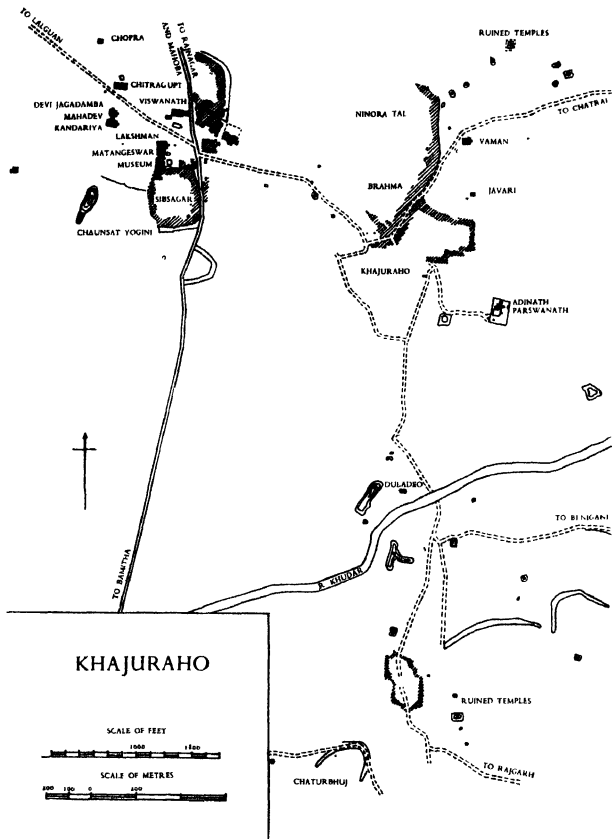
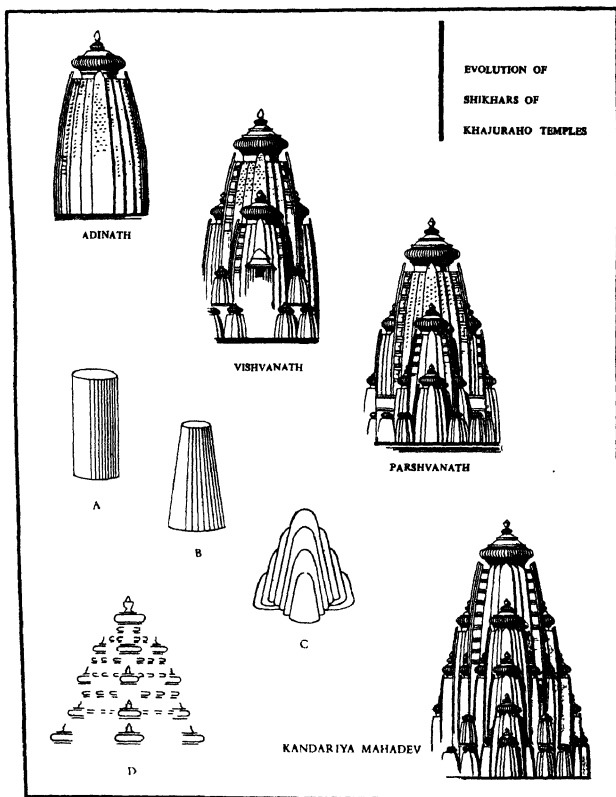
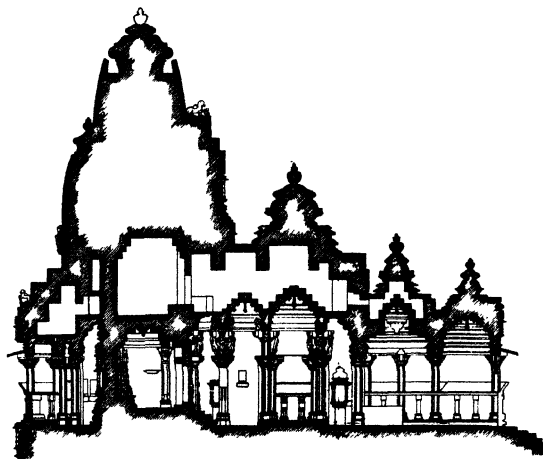
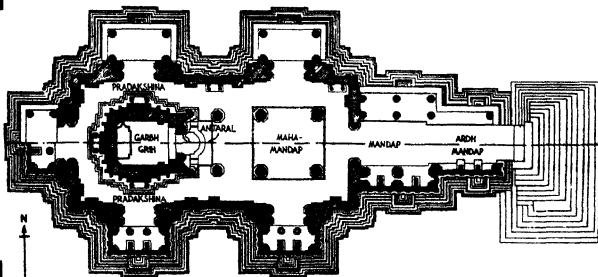
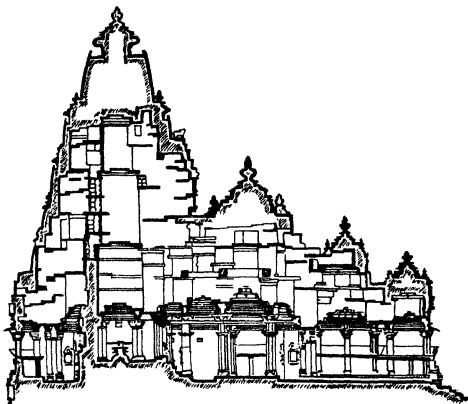
write our own books and construct our own buildings; and not theirs. But in one respect, what are we going to do? *Apropos* our worship, how are we going to match our work to theirs? They raised to their gods such magnificent temples. How do we propose to honour our gods? And, for that matter, which, what and who are our gods?

The gods which the Great God, Man, has made and is proud of? The Machine which has trampled the human soul under its huge wheels? Mammon? so that cash is the sole nexus between man and man? Warring political creeds, Communism and Democracy; and the Might of A- and H-Bombs against the power of weapons denoted by some other letters of the alphabet?—so, that we have a new language of destruction, a new Tantrik "Garland of Letters" wherein each letter is a snarling snake, or a poisonous plant? Or Sexus, the god of night-clubs, nude colonies and dancers' dens?

Yes, what gods do we men and women of today worship or propose to worship? This is important, for Man's soul can only recreate its faith and its vision, and as is our worship so shall our works be.

All over the earth almost every one is living a life which is incomplete, and none of us is making the 'house, where Gods may dwell', let alone making it "Beautiful, entire and clean". Yet with all the knowledge and wisdom that ten thousand years of man's history and experience place at our disposal, can we do no better? Now that we possess such means of conquering the forces of nature, we can create a heaven upon earth and live a life of sanity and health and joy, of peace and plenty for all, and of universal brotherhood—a life truly worthy of the *Homo Sapiens*, worthy of those who have a spark and sparkle of something which we usually call the Divine, which, anyway, is something more than the clay that sticks around us for our life-time, and which belongs to the sun and the stars, and beyond, to the Light these luminaries derive their own lustre from. Let us hope that good sense and our innate desire to live and rise will teach us to make gods such as will bestow upon us a new grace and happiness and gifts of intellectual and spiritual strength which earlier generations have not known.

And then, perhaps, we shall also build something which would be of lasting beauty and imperishable worth, something like the immortal temples of Khajuraho.

TO LALGUAN
CHOPRA
TO RAJNAGAR AND MAHOBA
RUINED TEMPLES
CHITRAGUPT
DEVI JAGADAMBA
VISWANATH
MAHADEV
KANDARIYA
NINORA TAL
TO CHATRAI
VAMAN
LAKSHMAN
MATANGESWAR
MUSEUM
BRAHMA
JAVARI
SIBSAGAR
CHAUNSAT YOGINI
KHAJURAHO
ADINATH
PARSWANATH
DULADEO
R. KHUDAR
TO BAMITHA
KHAJURAHO
SCALE OF FEET
SCALE OF METRES
RUINED TEMPLES
CHATURBHUJ
TO RAJGARH

The figures A, B, C and D show the stages of development of the main form of the tower. They indicate also how a simple solid is made to look complex through use of superimpositions. The miniatures add to the importance of the central stem and and impart to the tower the appearing of organic growth.

PLAN OF THE LAKSHMAN TEMPLE

PLAN OF THE KANDARIYA MAHADEV TEMPLE
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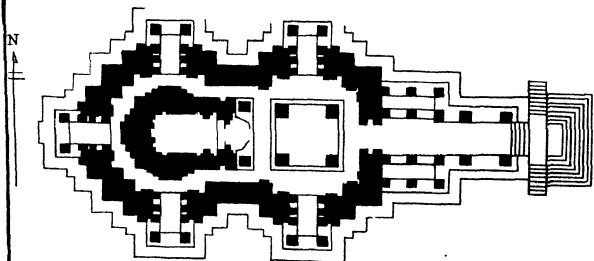
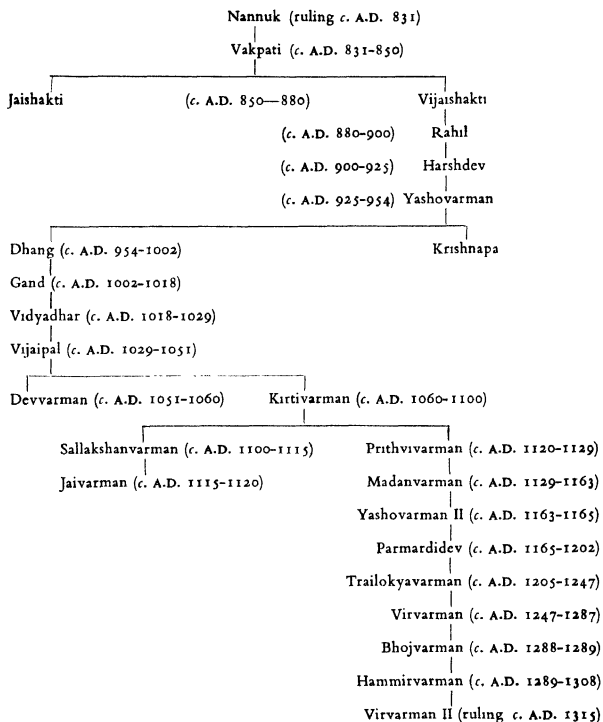

## GENEALOGICAL TABLE

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2. John Keats : *Ode to A Nightingale.*

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4. *Ibid.* p. 107.
5. S.K. Mitra : *Early Rulers of Khajuraho*, p. 22.
6. *Ibid.* p. 24
7. F.N. Wright : *The Chandel Thakurs.* Indian Antiquary, Vol. II.
8. W. Crooke : Quoted in N.S. Bose's *History of the Candellas of Jajakabhukti* pp. 2-3.
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10. *Ibid.* pp. 128, 133. V. 36.
11. *Ibid.* pp. 126, 132. V. 23.
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15. *Ibid.* p. 129.
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17. S.K. Mitra : *op. cit.*, p. 59.
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40. Krishna Deva : *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.
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7. *The Garland of Madurai Ibid.* p. 204.
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11. True more for history than for art !
12. Rajshekhar : Quoted in the *Age of Imperial Kanauj* pp. 383-384.
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15. Quoted in *The Struggle for Empire* : pp. 496-497.
16. J. Fergusson : *op. cit.*, p. 246.
17. Read 17 for 19
18. Read 18 for 20
19. Krishna Deva : *The Temples of Khajuraho*, p. 44.
20. Mahdi Husain : *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta* quoted in Krishna Deva : *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46, Fn.

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2. K.M. Munshi : *Saga of Indian Sculpture*, pp. 2-3.
3. Monod-Bruhl & Levi : *Indian Temples*, pp. x, xi.
4. E.B. Havell : Havell is emphatic on this point in all his writings : one must understand India if one would understand Indian art.
5. Sri Aurobindo : *The Foundation of Indian Culture*, pp. 229, 242-243.
6. *Mansar* : For further information see Acharya's translation of *Mansar* and Havell's interesting write-up in his *Ancient & Medieval Architecture of India*.
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13. Quoted in Coomaraswamy's The Dance of Shiva
14. J. Fergusson : *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* p. 245.
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16. Stella Kramrisch : A whole fat volume on Khajuraho could be culled from her great work *The Hindu Temple*.
17. Benjamin Rowland : *The Art and Architecture of India*, p. 163.
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| 25. | Stella Kramrisch : | *The Hindu Temple.* Vol. II. pp. 359, 360. 361. |
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| 28. | *Ibid.* | Vol. I, p. 175. |
| 29. | *Ibid.* | Vol. I, p. 207. |
| 30. | *Ibid.* | Vol. I, pp. 175-176. |
| 31. | Benjamin Rowland : | *op. cit.*, pp. 163-164. |
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| 33. | Margaret Mordecai : | *The Indian Dreamlands.* |
| 34. | Krishna Deva : | *op. cit.*, p. 46. |
| 35. | Percy Brown : | *op. cit.*, p. 130. |
| 36. | Krishna Deva : | *op. cit.*, p. 47. |
| 37. | Percy Brown : | *op. cit.*, p. 130. |
| 38. | E.B. Havell : | *Ancient & Medieval Architecture of India*, p. 209. |
| 39.–40. | See also Krishna Deva : | *The Temples of Khajuraho.* |
| 41. | E.B. Havell : | The craftsmen at a place like Abu are a living proof. |
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| 2. | V. Smith : | Quoted in Coomaraswamy's |
| 3. | George Birdwood : | *The Dance of Shiva*, p. 79. |
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| 5. | J. Fergusson : | *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, p. 34. |
| 6. | E.B. Havell : | Emphasis on idealism in Indian Art is Havell's favourite point. |
| 7. | Quoted in O.C. Gangoly & A. Goswami's : | op. cit., p. 10. |
| 8. | John Woodroffe : | His major contribution is in the field of Indian philosophy and religion. |
| 9. | E.B. Havel : | *Indian Sculpture & Painting.* pp. 9-10. |
| 10. | Sri Aurobindo : | *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, pp. 266-268. |
| 11. | Mrs. Walter Tibbits : | *The Voice of the Orient.* |
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| 13. | *Ibid.* | p. 186. |
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| 16. | John Irwin's | *Indian Art* (ed.) Sir Richard Winstedt(ed.) pp. 58-59. |
| 17. | J.P. Guha : | *Introducing Indian Art*, p. 101. |
| 18. | K.M. Munshi : | *Saga of Indian sculpture*, p. 4 |
| 19. | Stuart Piggot : | *Pre-historic India*, p. 151. |
| 20. | J.P. Guha : | *op. cit.*, p. 102. |
| 21. | S.K. Saraswati : | *A Survey of Indian Sculpture*, pp. 8-9. |
| 22. | Hiuen Tsang : | Quoted in J.P. Guha, *op. cit.* p. 107. |
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28. John Irwin : *op. cit.*, pp. 69-72.
29. S.K. Saraswati : *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.
30. J.P. Guha : *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121.
31. Quoted by S.K. Saraswati, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
32. *Ibid.* p. 82.
33. *Ibid.* p. 82-83.
34. K.M. Munshi : *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.
35. S.K. Saraswati : *op. cit.*, pp. 121, 122.
36. J.P. Guha : *op. cit.*, pp. 127, 128, 129.
37. A.K. Coomaraswamy : *op. cit.*, p. 35.
38. A.L. Basham : *The Wonder that was India*, p. 371.
39. John Irwin : *op. cit.* pp. 95-96.
40. O.C. Gangoli : *The Art of the Chandelas*, p. 20.
41. *Marg* : Vol. X. No. 3, *Homage to Khajuraho*, p. 2.
42. Stella Kramrisch : *The Hindu Temple*, Vol. II, pp. 300, 304, 308, 309.
43. O.C. Gangoli : *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.
44. On 'iconography' see Krishna Deva's *The Temples of Khajuraho*, pp. 60-63.
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48. Krishna Deva : *op. cit.*, p. 63.
49. Stella Kramrisch : *The Hindu Temple*, Vol. II, p. 370.
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51. Krishna Deva : *op. cit.*, p. 64.

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1. Benjamin Rowland : *The Art and Architecture of India*, p. 264.
2. O.C. Gangoli : *The Art of the Chandelas*, p. 28.
3. S.K. Mitra : *The Early Rulers of Khajuraho*, p. 219.
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5. K.M. Munshi : *Saga of Indian Sculpture*, p. 36.
6. W. G. Solomon : *The Charm of Indian Art* see pp. 33-35
7. *Marg* : Vol. X. No. 3. *Homage to Khajuraho*, p. 4.
8. J.J. Meyer : *Sexual Life in Ancient India*. (The Maid)
9. A.K. Coomaraswamy : *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, p. 27.
10. *Ibid.* pp. 154, 155, 156.
11. W. G. Solomon : *op. cit.*
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13. E.B. Havell : *The Ideals of Indian Art*, pp. 95-96.
14. K.M. Munshi : *op. cit.*, p. 37.
15. Arthur Schopenhauer : Essay *on Women* :
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2. Roderick Cameron : *Flower of the Mango Tree.*
3. If the erotic sculpture on these temples is connected with the Tantrik cult, then, according to the highest principles of *sadhna*, detumescence is out of the question.
4. Havelock Ellis: *Psychology of Sex (A manual for students)* p. 42, and pp. 251-252.
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16. Jacques Villon's statement in Unesco's *The Artist in Modern Society* : p. 104.
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## IX. THE EROTIC ENIGMA :

1. P.B. Shelley : *Adonais*
2. *Dhammpad* : 153-154.
3. The Buddha *The First Sermon.*
4. *Dialogues of Plato* *Phaedo*
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7. *Kath Upanishad* : I. 1.25-27 ; I. 2. 1-3.
8. *The Bible of the World* (ed.) Robert O. Ballou pp. 349-350.
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10. Indian literature is full of such arguments.
11. St. Paul : Epistle to the Galatians.
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13. *Brhdaranyak Upanishad* : I. 4. 1-5.
14. *Ibid.* IV. 3. 21.
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16. D.H. Lawrence : From the essay *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover.*
17. D.H. Lawrence : From the essay *Love was once a little Boy.*
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1. Willard Price : *Adventures in Paradise*, pp. 78-79.

2. D.H. Lawrence : Essay on *Pornography and Obscenity.*
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5. Quoted in Shri Yogendra's *Hatha Yoga Simplified.* p. 69.
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8. *Ibid.* pp. 130-131.
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7. Stella Kramrisch : *The Hindu Temple,* Vol. II. pp. 369-370,
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9. Radhakamal Mukerjee : *The Culture and Art of India.* p. 304.
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11. G. Cunningham : Quoted by Krishna Deva *op. cit.* "The general effect of this gorgeous luxury of embellishment is extremely pleasing"
12. Stella Kramrisch : *op. cit.,* Vol. II. p. 372.
13. Krishna Deva : *op. cit.,* pp. 56-57.
14. Majumdar & Pusalkar (Ed.) *The Struggle for Empire,* p. 572.
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17. J. Fergusson : *op. cit.,* p. 247.
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19. Majumdar & Pusalkar (Ed.) *op. cit.,* p. 569.
20. Stella Kramrisch : *op. cit.,* Vol. II. p. 382.
21. J. Fergusson : *op. cit.,* p. 456.
22. Krishna Deva : *op. cit.,* p. 55.
23. Stella Kramrisch *op. cit.,* Vol. II. p. 384.
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# INDEX

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

144. Duladeo Temple ; south-east side.
145. Shalbhanjika figures, interior ; Duladeo Temple.
146. Bands of sculptures, south-west wall ; Duladeo Temple.
147. Apsaras, south wall ; Duladeo Temple.
148. Row of sculptures, south wall ; Duladeo Temple.
149. A flying Vidyadhar ; upper row, south-west wall ; Duladeo Temple.
150. A Vidyadhar, upper row, south-west wall ; Duladeo Temple.
151. Chaturbhuj Temple; south side.
152. Vishnu; Chaturbhuj Temple.
153. Shiv, east side, upper row ; Chaturbhuj Temple.
154. Museum Gateway; inner compound.
155. Vrah ; Museum.
156. Ganesh ; Museum.
157. Mithun ; Museum.
158. Parvati ; Museum.
159. Mother and child ; Museum.
160. Mother and child ; Museum.
161. Skeletal figures ; Museum.
162. River-goddess ; Museum.
163. Bracket figure ; Museum.
164. Navgrahas ; Museum.
165. Frieze of music and dance ; Museum.
166. Frieze of music and dance ; Museum.
167. Inscription near entrance ; Lakshman Temple.
168. Detail of 167.
169. South-east side, upper row of sculptures ; Lakshman Temple.
170. Surasundari with mirror ; south west corner ; Kandariya Mahadev Temple.
171. Surasundari with mirror ; Devi Jagadamba Temple.
172. Surasundari with mirror ; Devi Jagadamba Temple
173. Surasundari, south wall ; Kandariya Mahadev.
174. A damsel playing with a ball, south-east wall, uppermost row ; Kandariya Mahadev.
175. Surasundari, south-west wall, uppermost row ; Kandariya Mahadev Temple.
176. Surasundari, south-west wall, uppermost row ; Kandariya Mahadev Temple.
177. Surasundari, south-west wall, uppermost row ; Kandariya Mahadev Temple.
178. Surasundari removing thorn, interior ; Vishvanath Temple.
179. Surasundari removing thorn, uppermost row ; south-west corner ; Kandariya Mahadev Temple.
180. Surasundari applying lac-dye, south-east wall, first row ; Parshvanath Temple.
181. Surasundari south wall ; Kandariya Mahadev Temple.
182. Surasundari applying vermillion ; Kandariya Mahadev Temple.
183. Surasundari, south-east wall, upper row ; Lakshman Temple.
184. Surasundari, south wall ; Devi Jagadamba Temple.
185. Surasundari, south wall ; Vishvanath Temple.
186. Surasundari ; Vishvanath Temple.
187. Surasundari ; Kandariya Mahadev Temple.
188. Surasundari, interior ; Vishvanath Temple.
189. Surasundari, south wall ; Vishvanath Temple.
190. Surasundari, south wall ; Kandariya Mahadev Temple.
191. Erotic sculptures, south wall ; Vishvanath Temple.
192. Erotic, south-west corner, uppermost row ; Kandariya Mahadev Temple.
193. Erotic, south-east wall ; Kandariya Mahadev Temple.
194. Erotic, south wall, second row ; Vishvanath Temple.
195. Erotic, south-west wall ; Kandariya Mahadev Temple.

# PLATES

16

23

24

34

48

57

62

66

106

107→

113

←112

120

121

123

124

125

137

140

141

164

171

173

165

166

173

75

188

189

191

195

197

200

203

204

205

212

3

214→

215

218

←217

219

220

223

225

226--

230